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NAME OF AUTHOR/*NOM DE L'AUTEUR* JONATHAN A. PETERS

TITLE OF THESIS/*TITRE DE LA THÈSE* A DANCE OF MASKS: SENGHOR, ACHEBE, SOYINKA AND AFRICAN CULTURAL HISTORY

UNIVERSITY/*UNIVERSITÉ* UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA, EDMONTON

DEGREE FOR WHICH THESIS WAS PRESENTED/ *GRADE POUR LEQUEL CETTE THÈSE FUT PRÉSENTÉE* DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

YEAR THIS DEGREE CONFERRED/*ANNÉE D'OBTENTION DE CE GRADE* SPRING 1975

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THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

A DANCE OF MASKS: SENGHOR, ACHEBE, SOYINKA AND AFRICAN CULTURAL HISTORY

BY

© JONATHAN A. PETERS

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH
IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE
OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

EDMONTON, ALBERTA
SPRING, 1975

THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research, for acceptance, a thesis entitled "A Dance of Masks: Senghor, Achebe, Soyinka and African Cultural History," submitted by Jonathan A. Peters in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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ABSTRACT

This study takes its title from the traditional African belief in the apotheosis of a mask-wearer when the proper combination of rhythm, dance, chant and ritual is obtained. The mask is still a powerful symbol in the moribund traditions of West Africa, the ancestral home of the three writers examined in the study, writers whose similar background and concerns are often obscured by conflicting ideologies. These writers are Léopold Sédar Senghor, (b. 1906) a Serer, who is Poet-President of Senegal; the novelist Chinua Achebe (b. 1930), an Ibo from Eastern Nigeria who rose to become Director of Broadcasting in Nigeria and is now at the University of Nsukka, Nigeria; and Wole Soyinka, playwright, poet, novelist, critic and university lecturer who is a Yoruba from Western Nigeria.

Following the introduction which sets the tone for the rest of the inquiry, I have in Part I closely analyzed four volumes of Senghor's poetry, those published between 1945 and 1961. In the poems the themes of Negritude recur, including themes of alienation and exile, ancestors and masks, devaluation of "white" and revaluation of "black" values. The poetic locale is Senghor's Childhood Kingdom of innocence and splendour.

In Part II the focus of attention is Achebe's four novels written and published between 1958 and 1966. A master of tragic irony, Achebe puts traditional African history in perspective by portraying the harmony which existed before, and the progressive moral decline that followed after, the arrival of the white man. Achebe's regret for the anarchic effects on the African consciousness of Europe's cultural

imposition is paralleled in his disillusionment with the present leadership in Africa. Like the concept of Negritude which he earlier supported, the African masks, for Achebe, have lost their earlier religious significance and instead have become toys for little boys.

I examine in Part III four of the eight published plays of Wole Soyinka a consistent critic of Negritude. Although he has fashioned elements from traditional Yoruba cosmology into a literary ideology, Soyinka is impatient with tributes to the past, whether they are subjective like Senghor's or objective like Achebe's. Soyinka looks beyond Africa and African man to make searing, satirical commentaries on human nature and human destiny. Thus, while the other two writers first begin by examining hypocrisy, greed and violence inflicted by one race upon another Soyinka views these vices as part of a cycle of human stupidity perpetuated by self-aggrandizing leaders and depravity. The mask, for Soyinka, may become a living spectacle whose hold on the people is no doubt exploited by ambitious priests, rulers or questers or these powerful men can themselves be revealed as puppets.

Senghor, Achebe and Soyinka are leading African writers in their special genres who have achieved international status. In spite of national problems like the drought in Senegal, the civil war and the reconstruction in Nigeria they have continued to write on personal, national and international concerns for which African history and culture are important points of reference.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to record my profound gratitude to all those who assisted directly or indirectly, in the culmination of this work. Specifically, I would like to thank Professor Eldred Jones of Fourah Bay College, the University of Sierra Leone, Professors Henry Kreisel and A. T. Elder of the University of Alberta and Dr. S. H. Kanu, at present Sierra Leone's Ambassador to West Germany, all of whom were in some way instrumental in my eventual enrolment in the graduate programme at the University of Alberta. The members of my thesis committee, Dr. Sheila Watson (supervisor), Dr. Roland Anderson and Dr. Juliet McMaster, were extremely helpful in the preparation of the manuscript. I cannot thank them enough for their invaluable comments, encouragement and patience during the process of writing. Communicating with me over a long distance they helped to give my presentation much of whatever lucidity it may have. Dr. D. D. Harrison, Director, African American Studies, University of Maryland Baltimore County, also deserves mention for putting staff and facilities at my disposal for the final typing as well as Mrs. Marla Kelly who assisted with the typing. Finally, I am indebted to my wife, Salome, not so much for her careful proofreading as for her support and understanding during those dark days when it sometimes seemed that our relationship and not my writing was being put to the test.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract iv

Acknowledgements vi

Abbreviations of the Works viii

Introduction 1

CHAPTER

PART I: Léopold Sédar Senghor

I. *Chants d'ombre*: Negritude, the Ancestors the Princes and the Gods 16

II. *Hosties noire*: From Sacrificial Victim to Scarifier 57

III. *Ethiopiques*: The Poet-Politician as Cultural Half-Caste 80

IV. *Nocturnes*: Negritude and Humanism 107

PART II: Chinua Achebe

V. *Things Fall Apart*: From Culture to Anarchy 131

VI. *Arrow of God*: Masks in Masquerade 165

VII. *No Longer at Ease*: Obi Okonkwo as Human Mask 189

VIII. *A Man of the People*: Anarchy as Archetype 212

PART III: Wole Soyinka

IX. *A Dance of the Forests*: The Universal Dome of Continuity 240

X. *Madmen and Specialists*: Masks of Deification and Defecation 283

Footnotes 343

Bibliography . . . .

ABBREVIATIONS OF THE WORKS

Senghor

NO	*Nocturnes*. (This is the only volume translated in its entirety by Reed and Wake.)
PO	*Poèmes*, the single edition of 1964 containing poems of the previous volumes, i.e., *Chants d'ombre, Hosties noires, Chants pour Naëtt* (later included, with minor revisions, in *Nocturnes*), *Ethiopiques* and *Nocturnes*. When citations are given exclusively with the reference *PO* and page number the translation is the present writer's. Otherwise (except where a different source is expressly given) translations are by Reed and Wake in one of the following:-
PP	*Prose and Poetry*
SP	*Selected Poetry*

Achebe

AG	*Arrow of God*
MP	*A Man of the People*
NLE	*No Longer at Ease*
TFA	*Things Fall Apart*. Both chapter and page numbers are supplied for Achebe's works since page numbers vary between English and American editions. Quotations are from the Heinemann editions.

Soyinka

FP	***Five** Plays* comprising *A Dance of the Forests, The Lion and the Jewel, The Swamp Dwellers, The Trials of Brother Jero* and *The Strong Breed*.
KH	*Kongi's Harvest*
MS	*Madmen and Specialists*
RO	*The Road*

Introduction

Who will teach rhythm to the world laid low by machines and cannons
Who will shout with joy to wake up the dead and the orphans at the dawn?
Say, who will give back the memory of life to the man with eviscerated
hopes?
They call us cotton men coffee men oily men
They call us men of death.
We are the men of the dance, whose feet regain force by drumming on the
hard earth.

- Senghor, "Priére aux masques" ("Prayer to the Masks").[1]

"The world is changing," [Ezeulu] had told him. "I do not like it. But I am like the bird Eneke-nti-oba. When his friends asked him why he was always on the wing he replied: 'Men of today have learnt to shoot without missing and so I have learnt to fly without perching.' I want one of my sons to join these people and be my eye there. If there is nothing in it you will come back. But if there is something there you will bring home my share. The world is like a Mask dancing. If you want to see it well you do not stand in one place. My spirit tells me that those who do not befriend the white man today will be saying *had we known* tomorrow."

- Achebe, *Arrow of God*.[2]

This is the last our feet
Shall speak to feet of the dead
And the unborn cling
To the hem of our robes
We thought the tune
Obeyed us to the soul
But the drums are newly shaped

And stiff arms strain
On stubborn crooks, so
Delve with the left foot
For ill-luck; with the left
Again for ill-luck; once more
With the left alone, for disaster
Is the only certainty we know.
- Soyinka, *Kongi's Harvest*.[3]

Léopold Sédar Senghor (b. 1906), a Serer from Senegal, Chinua Achebe (b. 1930), an Ibo from Eastern Nigeria, and Wole Soyinka (b. 1934), a Yoruba from Western Nigeria, have had a profound influence on African literature and thought since in the adjustment of Africa to the demands of the twentieth century West Africa has played an important part. West Africa is a complex region. In the course of its long history the peoples of West Africa had developed different and complex systems of organization. The region, too, had been opened early to outside influence. Senegal, for instance, is a predominantly Muslim country. In the nineteenth century this part of Africa was colonized not by a single colonizing power but by Europeans of different nationalities who, despite their common technologies and apparently common Christianity, spoke different languages, espoused different religious dogmas, structured different political systems and responded variously to the African peoples whose concepts, ontology, cosmology, metaphysics, social organizations, art and historical modalities they most frequently ignored, dismissed, or misunderstood.

The West African writers who are the subject of this study have certain common characteristics. All have had European influences. Each writes in the language of the European country to which through trade, evangelism, and colonization his people were exposed--Senghor in French, Achebe and Soyinka in English. Each has been recognized and accepted as a significant writer beyond the borders of West Africa and beyond the continent of Africa itself. One after a distinguished academic and political career became State-President of Senegal, another before the Nigerian Civil War the Director of External Services for the Nigerian Broadcasting System's Voice of Nigeria, the third was appointed Director of Theatre at the University of Ibadan and was a prisoner in the jails of Kirikiri and Kaduna at the time of Biafra's secession and the civil war. All as Africans, but each in his distinctive way, have been concerned in their writings with African experience, African modes of consciousness, with traditional or historically transformed images, rituals and social structures of their own common but diversified culture.

Senghor is the well-known poet and statesman who, with Aimé Césaire of Martinique and Léon Damas of Guyana spearheaded the movement known as Negritude which began in the nineteen thirties. Senghor was the theorist and Césaire in his celebrated *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal* was, initially, the practitioner. The poets of Negritude asserted their solidarity as a group as well as their belief in the unity and excellence of a universal black culture in response to claims by Europeans that the black man had no heritage, no culture, and therefore no equality with his white counterpart. In both his poetry and his polemical writings Senghor posits a distinctive African culture based on specifically African rhythms and images. The recognition of this distinctive culture, he believes, is essential for the renaissance of a dying Europe and eventually for the establishment of what he calls, following Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, the "Civilisation de l'Universel."[4] In his first published volume of poems *Chants d'ombre* is a poem entitled "Prière aux masques" in which he wrote:

Let us answer "Present!" at the rebirth of the world
As the leaven that the white flour needs.
For who will teach rhythm to the world laid low by machines and cannons[?]

In another poem from the same collection, "A la Mort," appealing again perhaps to the specific symbol of Africa which had fired the imagination of the French based avant-garde at the beginning of the twentieth century he wrote:

I shall proclaim
Africa like the sculptor of masks with the powerful eye
That she will return to the grass, blending her deep voice
with dawn's chorus.

Achebe, a novelist, is concerned not with the identity of a racial group but with the specific problems of his own people. In his novels, avoiding idealization, he evokes the endearing, well-ordered and cohesive world of his Ibo people in the period prior to the colonizing impulse of Europeans in the late nineteenth century. He then traces their progress through the period of entrenched colonization to independence and after. In his novels as in Senghor's poetry the mask provides a central point of reference, but here not as an idealized symbol but in its functional role. At one point in Achebe's third novel *Arrow of God* Ezeulu threatens to call out the fearsome masked spirit called Ichele to restore order and after a passage only a few pages earlier in the novel in which the African corporal sent by the English administrator to summon Ezeulu the chief priest has observed:

> "But we cannot come and go for nothing. When a masked spirit visits you you have to appease its footprints with presents. The white man is the masked spirit of today." (*AG* XIII, 190).

In the same context Wade, the junior administrator, objects to the presence of an English florin in a sacrificial offering:

> "I don't mind if they use their cowries and manillas but the head of George the Fifth!" (*AG* XIV, 199).

Soyinka, a playwright, a poet of merit, and the author of two novels, jailed for his denunciation of what he called "the genocide-consolidated dictatorship of the Army" under General Gowon in the Nigerian papers, assumes an inherent similarity in the nature of African and European man. He, too, returns to the past, not to idealize it as Senghor does but to expose the grisly interior which is masked by the exterior manifestations of pomp and empire. His voice when he invokes the traditional masks comes from what he calls the "fourth stage" of existence, from the "immeasurable gulf of transition," from "the vortex of archetypes and the home of the tragic spirit."[5]

As might be expected in any vital movement these writers, both in their public utterances and critical writings, have criticized one another on matters of ideology, sincerity, integrity of artistic expression, often in ways that suggest a radical dissimilarity of subject matter and approach. Soyinka became known as an arch enemy of Negritude when his remark that a tiger does not go about proclaiming his tigritude began to be quoted approvingly by opponents and disapprovingly by supporters of the movement. An ambiguously suppressed portion of his remark, however, is said to have been supplied at a conference in Berlin in 1964: the tiger proclaims his tigritude by pouncing.[6] The implication is that writers should talk less about their Negritude and demonstrate it more in action. Soyinka was not, however, satisfied with Senghor's action and in a critical essay, "And After the Narcissist?" he takes Senghor to task for a self-indulgent narcissism which prevents the realization of any new awareness throughout the animist world he pretends to conjure up. Soyinka believes that the constant reaching toward the past in love and praise is one of the sterile by-products of the movement. In an interview in 1964, too, Soyinka lamented Achebe's return to the past in *Arrow of God*, his third novel, when his second *No Longer at Ease*, had shown his concern for more contemporary society. With growing conviction Soyinka considers that contemporary society is the proper subject for the artist who must transcend reality to project a realistic vision of the future.[7]

Senghor has on several occasions made a strong defence of Negritude which he has defined, in his most consistent formulation, as "the sum total of the cultural values of the black world."[8] In his remarks he has singled out for comment Soyinka and South African writer Ezekiel Mphahlele, the two most vocal critics of the philosophy in the early nineteen sixties. Senghor suggests that their disenchantment with Negritude stems in part from the fact that the two men write in the English rather than in the French tradition--

a suggestion that has led to charges of "cultural imperialism" from English-speaking writers.

Polemics apart, Senghor and Soyinka have a fundamentally different view of African man in his socio-Historic context. Senghor regards the African sensibility as distinct from the European sensibility. The African sensibility he sums up in two words, rhythm and emotion, which are often interchangeable. For Senghor emotion is a gift possessed by the Negro and is at the heart and soul of his being, of his Negritude, and consequently of his outlook on life. Since emotion touches the essence of things and not their surface, the African is moved not by a physical as much as by a mystical apprehension of reality which goes beyond the "sign" to the "sense" of the object perceived. Thus, "What moves him in a dancing mask," Senghor declares, "is, through the image and the rhythm, a new vision of the 'god'."[9] Senghor believes that the European, too, has his own gifts although he has abused many of them. This abuse, particularly European man's increasing dependence on machine civilization, has led to the European's alienation from himself and from all fundamental values. Senghor does not want to create further cleavage between African and European. He looks forward to an eclectic world culture to which the African would contribute his characteristic vitality.

Soyinka's tragic sensibility does not allow him to participate in any vision of the African's investiture in a society in which as Sartre has suggested the sombre raptures of black wine will be found under the white skin.[10] Instead he sees, when he strips excrescences away, an innate sameness, a preponderantly bestial nature in both, an identity which would seem to confirm the equality of the races more than any biological or philosophical treatise. It is this dark side of human nature, violent and evil, that both fascinates and repels Soyinka and makes him impatient with what he views as the plaintive self-love and glorification of the past in the writing of those who are inspired by the cult of Negritude.

Achebe seems to reconcile the opposing ideologies of Senghor and Soyinka. In his speeches, interviews, and critical writings he has spoken about the evocation in his novels of a well-ordered Ibo society with its good and bad sides. In "The Role of the Writer in a New Nation" he responds in a key passage to critics like Soyinka who take him to task for failing to focus on contemporary issues:

> This is my answer to those who say that the writer should be writing about contemporary issues--about politics in 1964, about city life, about the last *coup d'état*. Of course, these are all legitimate themes for the writer but as far as I am concerned the fundamental theme must first be disposed of. This theme--put quite simply--is that African peoples did not hear of culture for the first time from Europeans; that their societies were not mindless but frequently had a philosophy of great depth and value and beauty, that they had poetry and, above all, they had dignity. It is this dignity that many African peoples all but lost in the colonial period, and it is this that they must now regain. The worst thing that can happen to any people is the loss of their dignity and self-respect. The writer's duty is to help them regain it by showing them in human terms what they lost. . . . After all the novelist's duty is not to beat this morning's headline in topicality, it is to explore in depth the human condition.[11]

In another essay, "The Novelist as Teacher," he mentions the props which will be abandoned when the African is once more on his feet--Negritude, preoccupation with an African personality, African socialism among others.[12] Together with his desire to restore dignity to the African cultural heritage he wishes to show the black man's cultural values in their historical perspective. The slogans, the manifestos and formularies are, he recognizes, simply temporary structures. Beyond paying a debt of love to his people he wishes to portray the human condition he knows and reveals with both its good and its evil.

Through all the heated and murky debates about Negritude and the African personality a number of concessions have been made on all sides. Senghor admits that Negritude is a myth but declares it is a true myth.[13] He also agrees that French-speaking writers who embrace Negritude "have the faults of the French--we talk rather than act,"[14] whereas Anglophones practise their Negritude more than they talk about it. Interviewed some time after the Nigerian civil war, Achebe declared that the concept of Negritude had been over exploited and no longer seemed to function; but he counselled tolerance, adding that there is no absolutism in truth.[15] Soyinka has himself admitted that whatever demerits the concept may have, Negritude does have historical validity and has inspired a number of works of enduring merit.[16]

Even if the three writers have conflicting views on the interpretation and significance of African culture all work with similar materials against the common backcloth of that culture (to borrow

Soyinka's theatre image). In the work of each of the writers the African mask is a significant symbol. All evoke or note the use of the mask and the mask image as fundamental artifact and image of African ontology. In his study *Ambiguous Africa: Cultures in Collision*, the French anthropologist Georges Balandier speaks of the aversion he felt when on a visit to the Musée d'Hommes he saw a collection of masks "so painstakingly assembled in order to construct an image of exotic civilizations." "I detest objects," he said, "above all those regarded as works of art, when they are divorced from the human context which gives them their full significance; objects under glass as helpless in the presence of sightseers as the dead in the presence of the crowds on All Saints' Day."[17] In the work of the three writers the mask is for the most part restored to its human context.

The African mask is a piece of sculpture that is functional. The carved work fulfils one or more of several functions which may be sacred or profane, personal or communal, serious or satirical. Because it is functional the mask is usually cast aside when it has outlived its usefulness or, since it is a stylized rather than a naturalistic representation of the human face, when it has become outmoded. As an object it has only its relatively insignificant quota of vital energy that, in African ontology, is found in all matter and substance of the visible world--animal, vegetable and mineral. This force is infused into material nature in hierarchic proportions from the least particle to the immanent phenomena and beyond them to the world of spirits. Man is placed at the centre of the physical and spiritual universe. In traditional societies throughout Africa both the mask and the statue, as image and symbol, are an integral part of the life of the people in both spiritual and secular domains between which (as between the worlds of the living and the dead or unborn), there is no vital separation.[18] L. Marfurt has observed that "African masks actively participate in life, in private actions as well as in public affairs. They reflect and reveal human existence in its entirety, in its complexity as part of cosmic existence--animal, spiritual and divine."[19] He also remarks that the mask has the dual effect of disguising or transforming the wearer and the ambivalence of serving good and evil ends.

The ambivalent quality inherent in the masks as image and symbol is explored in the critical writings of Senghor, Achebe and Soyinka. Frequently in Senghor's poems the mask is that of the dead ancestor who, according to tradition, lives on until his vital link with the present is severed. His descendants must continue oblations to him in the form of food and wine to keep him from becoming "perfectly dead"[20] both physically and spiritually. Sometimes the ancestor is in spirit form or in the blood or is present as a totem animal guardian, since sacred animals are seen as intermediaries between the physical and spiritual modes of existence.[21] The faces of black people in the poetry of Senghor are often mask-faces or else envisioned as possessing the contours and characteristics of masks. For its part Africa, the black land, is often an anthropomorphic statue, graceful and dignified. All these are tradition-bound masks which reveal the ancestor behind the representation, or transform the human face and figure. They are in sharp contrast with the mask of lies and deception that Senghor, in his existentialist role as a black man in a white world, discovers again and again in the countenance and conduct of the white man. This mask of deception is most notable in the white man's dealings with an oppressed black race but is also apparent, on occasion, in his dealings with members of his own race. Senghor finds it necessary to lament the wrongs done to his own race. He implicitly rejects the stereotypes foisted on him by the colonizer and asserts that he is "master of the dance"[22] in touch with the physical and spiritual universe as he dances the dance of life.

Senghor's development during the phase of strident protest and self-determination among colonized peoples in the nineteen thirties and nineteen forties helped to dictate the panegyric quality of his works in the medium of poetry. Poetry lends itself to subjective expression and Senghor's own practice is perceptibly balanced by a measure of humanism and the notion of complementarity of world (more specifically black and white) cultures. Achebe's choice of the novel as the vehicle for his ideas on patterns of culture and history places on him the burden of objectivity which he manages very well. At the same time, a close examination of his works--especially those set in the past--will reveal a subtle but healthy bias on the side of the African society he depicts with candour and good sense. Achebe could well afford to be objective. He began his writing career at a time when African countries were becoming independent and he saw primarily the need to instill self-confidence and a sense of self-worth into his compatriots in Nigeria and in Africa generally. He tried to rectify the portrait of a depraved and inglorious ancestry and a worthless African culture painted by Europeans during the eras of slavery and colonization. Contemporaneous with this rectification was his recognition that the impact of Europe on Africa was not a dead loss to Africa. Africans must share European ideas and technology if they are worth having, for even where change is not desirable it may be inevitable. The best strategy, therefore, is to use all the means one has to resist especially the evil aspects of change, but to be ready to accommodate change as best one can.

Soyinka, still in his thirties,[23] is something of an angry young man who views paeans to the past, whether subjective or objective, with impatience. His concern is with the present set in a space-time continuum that includes the past and the future. It is a conception of time that is distinct from the neat divisions of Western man. Working in the main in the genre of the drama which allows the setting up of internal criteria for the creation of an objective reality he explores the profundities of Yoruba cosmology in its representation of times past, present and future (in the African sense) through the entities of the dead, the living and the unborn respectively. His tragic vision of life finds expression in a satire which is thoroughly pessimistic. This vision is based on the mysteries of the creator-destroyer god, Ogun, the Yoruba god of War and Creativity, and on the Yoruba myth of a snake, representative of the life and death cycle, eternally eating its tail. This world view with its emphasis on forces of death finds cogent expression in Soyinka's imagery and themes. The Yoruba myth accords well with his dim view of human progress and civilization as a cyclical pattern of folly and violence, a pattern which remains unchanged because of the irrepressible savagery of human nature and will remain unchanged unless human nature itself can be altered. The possibility of alteration is vaguely suggested in the "Mobius Strip" which is a "symbol of optimism . . . as it gives the illusion of a 'kink' in the circle and a possible centrifugal escape from the eternal cycle of karmas that has become the evil history of man."[24] The surface of things may change and harmonious tradition may yield to monotonous modernism, but for Soyinka the drums still beat out a rhythm of violence and disaster.

The study which follows discusses the ways in which Senghor, Achebe and Soyinka have responded to the African background which is their common inheritance. I have tried to show in what ways their works are governed and influenced by their individual talent, their individual sensibilities and experiences as well as by the mood and outlook of their times. I have examined each work critically in an attempt to present a composite picture not only of each writer's development of theme and technique but also of the writer's vision of culture and society in relation to history. It is not the purpose of the study simply to note the instances in which masks are invoked or verbal references to them are made, but to demonstrate the appeal of these writers to an African ontology in an historical and cultural frame modified and complemented, no doubt, by other factors. The mask is, after all, a symbol of great complexity and ambiguity. Senghor uses it to evoke the past and to provide an analogy for his own poetry. Achebe employs it to chart the progressive decline of its religious significance to the point where little boys go around with their tame mask at Christmas time. Soyinka exploits the masquerade as spectacle and explores its mystic application in traditional lore, but asks rhetorically, if there is truly a God or gods that watch over man or if it is man's love of worship or self-worship that leads him to project concepts of divinity and immortality. This nagging question applies not just to the beggar-masks and tin gods of fancy, nor to the entertainment masks and occasional masks of pomp and revelry. It also calls in doubt the spiritual substance of the solemn masks invoked by Senghor from the four cardinal points, the *egwugwu*[25] who regulate the society in Achebe's imagined village and even the dance of a mask in the state of possession which Soyinka's own characters conjure up before our eyes.

Chapter I

Chants d'ombre: Negritude, the Ancestors, The Princes and the Gods

I

> What is this continent for our poets? "The black land where the ancients sleep," replies Guy Tyrolien. What, then, were these men who were thus uprooted by an unsurpassed savagery from their country, from their gods, and from their families? Césaire the professor replies: "Mild mannered men, polite and courteous, undoubtedly superior to their executioners . . . They knew how to build houses, administer empires, construct towns, cultivate fields, melt minerals, weave cotton, forge the iron." But they are less men whose civilizations can be compared with European civilization than they are men embued with life: beings swayed by cosmic forces, forces that have contact with the sun and the stars, the earth, fire and water, the animal, the tree and the pebble. Men of discipline and work, but also men of liberty and joy; hence the myth of prodigious Africa, *Childhood Kingdom*, I mean of recovered virtues. It is the ultimate end of the pilgrimage to sources, the nostalgia of all our poets. It is Negritude which they must live and preach as the Good News.
>
> \- Léopold Senghor.[1]

Léopold Sédar Senghor has been accurately described as "the poet and theorist of synthesis against apartness."[2] In his poetry as in his other writings, he has again and again solicited a *rapprochement* between Africa and Europe, the two continents that have played a major role in his life and in that of many Africans, whether directly or indirectly. The synthesis he proposes (Senghor himself calls it symbiosis) is, however, one based on complementarity rather than identity, for Senghor is also an exponent of the thesis that the Negro possesses a quintessence that distinguishes him from other races--a uniqueness from which stems the distinct contribution that he can make to a hybrid universal culture.

Before he can make an effective contribution to universal culture, however, the Negro must first of all, according to Senghor and other proponents of Negritude, recover his lost dignity and win recognition from the white world for his values and his cultural heritage. Consequently, the dismissal of the black man's culture as savage and heathenish following a policy instituted during the Slave Trade and the colonization of Africa must now be discontinued. Using the white man's own methods Senghor, as poet of Negritude, will devalue "white" values and at the same time revalue "black" ones. In other words, it is not only the territory of Africa that has to be decolonized but the mental attitudes of people--both black and white--towards the black race; hence the preaching of the Good News of Negritude, that apocalypse of a future world order in which the races will live together harmoniously.

If it is true that the revolutionary nature of much poetry of Negritude belies the symbiosis which Senghor advocates, it is also true that his own method avoids the radicalism noticeable in the works of his contemporaries. These contemporaries include Léon Damas, the Guyanese and Aimé Césaire, the Martiniquan, whose prose poem *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal*, written during the nineteen thirties when he was associated with Senghor, Damas and others in the founding of the philosophy of blackness, has come to be regarded as the centrepiece of Negritude.[3] Instead, Senghor has throughout his poetic career attempted to maintain an equilibrium between his cherished dreams of an African childhood and the mixed blessings of European, specifically French, culture. Even in his first collection of published poems, *Chants d'ombre* which treats of childhood memories and the exile from self and motherland, the poet makes a plea for the acceptance of and forgiveness for all the wrongs done to him and his race during centuries of suffering. *Hosties noires* was also written during the most revolutionary phase in the development of the ideology. Its poems bear even deeper marks of this desire. The concluding poem entitled "Prière de Paix" is an appeal for peace. In this second volume of Senghor's poetry, black soldiers from America and Africa play a sacrificial role as Europe's saving grace during the Second World War and thus vicariously relive the sufferings their ancestors underwent for the material well-being of Europeans. To a large extent, the later poetry published in *Ethiopiques* and *Nocturnes* serves to modify and to elaborate the ideas which are already present in Senghor's earlier poems, in the light both of the poet's own personal development and that of the philosophy he shares with other (mainly French-speaking) black writers.

The first chapter of this section on the poetry of Senghor will outline themes of Negritude and important aspects of African ontology in a close reading of some of the poems of *Chants d'ombre*. The two main features of Senghor's iconology which will be considered are the ancestors and the masks. The second chapter, on *Hosties noires*, will examine the development of the myth of Negritude which portrays the black man as god-like, as the direct descendant of Christ. In this second volume of poetry, Senghor appeals more to Christian concepts than to African religious ones, but the underlying theme of sacrifice is common to both religions. The epics and epistles represent the twin poles of Senghor's divided loyalties in *Ethiopiques*. At the end of *Chants d'ombre* he had poetically chosen Africa instead of Europe while he remained in France; in this third volume he is faced with two choices: the choice between a life as poet and a life as politician and the choice between the favoured political career and an incompatible love. The epics contain his most blatant espousal of the inverted racism of Negritude while the epistles reveal the middle-aged poet as a somewhat prosaic lover reflecting about poetry. The love songs of *Nocturnes* (these songs were first published separately under the title of *Chants pour Naëtt*) have all the impatience and the passion of a young-blooded lover whose beloved often reproduces the grace and serenity of African masks. The songs precede the five elegies which confirm Senghor's humanism and invite a discussion of his latest view of civilization and history.[4]

II

Since Senghor apparently abandoned the practice of dating his poems in the published volumes after *Hosties noires* and, at any rate, carried it out consistently only in this work, it is impossible to ascertain the chronological order of the poems in *Chants d'ombre*, his first volume of poetry. Senghor's ~~poems~~ are, however, for the most part variations on the theme of Negritude for which he has provided a working definition: "the sum total of the cultural values of the black world."[5] The dominant mood ~~in~~ *Chants d'ombre* has less to do with a vindication of the poet's blackness than with the sense of nostalgia for his native village of Joal. It is a mood brought about--and sustained--by a feeling of exile in Paris, of alienation from his "semblables" in the streets of the metropolis, of being cut off from the idyllic pleasures of a Childhood Kingdom. Sometimes in these poems he adopts the pose of childlike simplicity or of filial reverence towards the spirits of the ancestors or even of youthful timidity as in the poem entitled "Porte dorée":

> The least imposing taxi makes my heart roll and throb on the giant
>   waves of the Atlantic
> A single cigarette makes me stagger like the sailor along the road
>   at the port of call
> I still say just like the faraway bush pupil
> "Good morning, madam . . . How do you do?"
> (*PO* 10).

An argument can be made for a deliberate thematic arrangement of the poems in *Chants d'ombre*. The sequence opens on a sombre note in keeping with the title of the poem "In Memoriam" as we find the poet-persona isolated in his "tower of glass" on a Sunday in Paris.

From this point the sequence moves on to reveries about a night on the Sine and to memories of Joal. These memories of Senghor's childhood world introduce the theme of alienation. The progression of the sequence gathers momentum when the poet introduces some of the archetypal images of his African cosmology--the black woman, the mask, the totem. The climax is reached in the epic poem "Que m'accompagnent Koras et balafong" in which the poet celebrates the predicament created by a need for choice between the "two antagonistic worlds" of Africa and Europe. Once he has chosen "the whole peasant race throughout the world" the downward thrust begins. The poet enters once more into the beatific realm of the lost paradise of childhood in preparation for the real return, from exile, of the prodigal son. In spite of these movements, however, the prevailing note in the work is one of regret: regret for the lost world of his early youth in the environs of Sine-Saloum, for the ancestors with whom he cannot commune in the same way as before, for the distance between him and his white brothers in Paris, for the warmth of the African night in the midst of a Europe cold as death, and for the pastoral fields of Joal.

The basic technique employed in "In Memoriam" is that of contrast. The opening lines of the poem already make this plain:

Sunday.
The crowding stony faces of my fellows make me afraid.
Out of my tower of glass haunted by headaches and my restless Ancestors
I watch the rooves and hills wrapped in mist
Wrapped in peace. . .the chimneys are heavy and stark.
(*PO* 9, *PP* 103).

On a day of communion and brotherhood there is only fear, distance and hardness. The speaker is cut off from this crowd no more by his tower of glass than by the frosty countenances of the people in the street down below. Since "In Memoriam" is a poem of remembrance, we are introduced to the "dead" only to find that the dead are Senghor's dreams--"all my dreams made dust / All my dreams, blood freely spilt along the streets, mingled with blood from butcheries." The poet here allows himself a flight of fancy in a sinister but obscure linking of dream with the blood of butcheries. This linkage enables him to compare his own dead dreams with those "dead who have always refused to die, who have resisted death / From Sine to the Seine." These other dead are identical with the "restless Ancestors" who, earlier in the poem, were associated with the migraines that haunt the poet in his isolation. Because Senghor's poetry is personal in character we can see in this internal conflict the struggle between the African traditional religion of his forefathers and the Roman Catholicism which the elder Senghor had embraced and passed on to his son, the aspiring member of the *tala*[6] group who wanted to become a priest. On account of this double heritage, the power of the ancestors has been felt in his weak veins not only in the Parisian suburb but also during his formative years in his native land along the banks of the Sine, the river which is to Senegal and Africa as the Seine is to France and Europe.

The paired images have, by now, become apparent: the poet in his glass tower and the stony-faced passers by; the "dead dreams" and the dead ancestors who refuse to die; the banks of Sine Saloum and those of the Seine above which rise the mist-covered hills and roofs of the city. The poem comes full cycle and ends, as it began, with the poet in his tower, the people in the streets:

O dead, defend the rooves of Paris in this sabbath mist
Rooves that guard my dead
That from the dangerous safety of my tower, I may go down into the
    streets
To my brothers whose eyes are blue
Whose hands are hard. (*PO* 10, *PP* 103).

A significant change has, nonetheless, taken place in the process. The living dead, the ancestors who at the outset were restless, haunting the poet like his migraines, are at the end implored to watch over Paris and to protect his other dead, the listless dreams that course along the streets. On the other hand, everything associated with his "brothers whose eyes are blue" is cold, hard, distant. On this sabbath day their forbidding, stony faces make him afraid, they instill fear and hostility instead of love; even though "Yesterday was All Saints, the solemn anniversary of the sun," yet "In all the cemeteries, there was no one to remember" because his real dead are in faraway Sine-Saloum. In this first poem of the anthology, we discover some of the themes that will recur later in Senghor's works: the decadence of Europe which needs the rejuvenating blood of Africa ("A New York"), the omnipresence of the ancestors ("Totem"), and the desire for peace and reconciliation ("Prière de Paix").

The setting of "Nuit de Sine" is "the pastoral heart of Sine" which the poet searches for in vain in the poem entitled "Tout le long du jour"--significantly a poem which is set in Senegal during one of Senghor's vacations. Eminently descriptive and evocative, "Nuit de Sine," the poem of an African night, utilizes, in its first three sections, more or less conventional images of a tropical world:

Above, the swaying palm trees rustle in the high night breeze
Hardly at all. No lullaby even.
The rhythmic silence cradles us.
. . . .
See the tired moon comes down to her bed on the slack sea
The laughter grows weary the story-tellers even
Are nodding their heads like a child on the back of its mother
The feet of the dancers grow heavy, and heavy the voice of the answering
choirs.

It is the hour of stars, of Night that dreams
Leaning upon this hill of clouds, wrapped in its long milky cloth.
The roofs of the huts gleam tenderly. What do they say so secretly
to the stars?
Inside the fire goes out among intimate smells that are acrid and
sweet. (*PO* 14, *PP* 104).

Swaying palm fronds, rhythmic music and dance, story-telling and laughter, limpid moonlight, a child on its mother's back, an aura of mystery and charm--these conventional images no more belong to Senghor's native Joal than mist and snow to Paris and one is therefore not surprised to find the poet, already in the first stanza, equating the "rhythmic silence" of this night in Sine with the beating of the pulse of Africa and her sons:

Listen to its song, listen to our dark blood beat, listen
To the deed pulse of Africa beating in the mist of forgotten villages.

The prevailing mood in the three stanzas is one of languor. In the dreamy atmosphere the participants in the social ritual become drugged with sleep in a sublimely peaceful relationship of warm intimacy. The close bond is suggested in part by the image of the child on the back of its mother and the long milky cloth of night, in part by the rhythmic harmony of participants and spectators and by the very conspiratorial intimacy among the huts from which sharp and sweet smells emanate.

Into this pastoral ambience the poet introduces, once again, the spirits of his ancestors, but this time, in keeping with the sense of human warmth that he has evoked, his forebears are invited to engage in a human activity--that of conversation--under the friendly glow of an oil lamp. The woman addressed is an archetypal figure, the African mother with "perfumed hands, hands softer than fur" whose role is the antithesis of those blue-eyed brothers with hard hands. The poem concludes with a picture of tender repose as Senghor makes ready to plunge into "the high profundities of sleep":

Let me listen in the smoky hut where there comes a glimpse of the
    friendly spirits
My head on your bosom warm like a *dang* smoking from the fire,
Let me breathe the smell of our Dead, gather and speak out again
    their living voice, learn to
Live before I go down, deeper than diver, into the high profundities
    of sleep. (*PO* 15, *PP* 104-5).

While "Nuit de Sine" postulates an integral experience, "Joal" makes use of the device of recall: "I remember" is repeated again and again throughout this short lyric. In his exile in Europe the poet's mind goes back to those scenes in his past which are connected with splendour and pomp, pleasure and love, feasting and the excitement of village sport. The poem celebrates an escape into scenes of a lost childhood, scenes that are quickly flashed and are as quickly relinquished for other reminiscences. The recall of Joal, the little Serer village where Senghor spent his earliest years, is enough to set off the chain of recollection: "Joal / I remember." Although each of these recollections can be expanded to produce a wealth of associations, we are given only a glimpse of one scene before we move on to another. In this poem the *topoi*, though not all purely African as in "Nuit de Sine," are imbued with an African flavour whether it is the "*signares*[7] in the green shadow of the verandas" or the *Tantum Ergo* sung with a pagan rhythm. As a matter of fact, the poet juxtaposes two different and apparently irreconcilable rituals--the animist and the Roman Catholic--which he has attempted to reconcile in himself:

I remember the funeral feasts, smoking with the blood of slaughtered
    cattle
With the noise of quarrels and the *griot's* rhapsodies.

I remember pagan rhythmic singing of the *Tantum Ergo*
And processions and palms and triumphal arches. (*PO* 15-16, *PP* 106).

It is when he recalls activities such as the dance of nubile girls and the wrestling matches in which the spectator vicariously participates that the force of the reverie becomes spent. The pure shout of love by the women and the shouting of the praise greeting, *Kor Siga*, shock the poet back into the reality of a life of exile in Europe as he shifts to the melancholy rhythm of the blues--that orphaned African jazz rhythm as he calls it:

I remember, I remember. . .
In my head the rhythm of the tramp tramp
So wearily down the days of Europe where there comes
Now and then a little orphaned jazz that goes sobbing, sobbing, sobbing.

Four of the poems of *Chants d'ombre*--"Femme noire," "Masque nègre," "Prière aux Masques" and "Totem"--may be called mask-poems for they deal with the mask as ancestral figure, work of art, symbol of a god and of spiritual essences beyond the physical artifact. The first of these mask-poems "Femme noire," addresses an unnamed woman, passive and gentle, with whom the speaker in the poem is in communion. Unlike the woman in an earlier poem, "Nuit de Sine," the portrait of this woman fills the whole canvas as first her classic attributes followed by her particular features and finally her enduring universal traits are etched. The poem opens into a sun-baked noon in summer, and the sight of this classic black woman whose form is remembered from childhood prompts the praise-song that Senghor chants:

Naked woman, black woman
Clothed with your colour which is life, with your form which is beauty!
In your shadow I have grown up; the gentleness of your hands was laid
    over my eyes.
And now, high up on the sun-baked pass, at the heart of summer, at
    the heart of noon, I come upon you, my Promised Land,
And your beauty strikes me to the heart like the flash of an eagle.
(*PO* 16, *PP* 105).

The first detail about this woman is that she is naked. In all Western poetry, even in the most sensual, it is unusual to find a poem praising a woman's beauty that introduces her simple nakedness as her first attribute.[8] This detail is followed by the revelation of her black colour which indicates her race and the reader realizes that he is not reading a conventional poem written in the Western tradition. This realization is quickly confirmed by the line following which celebrates her "colour which is life," her "form which is beauty." Thus, without trepidation or fanfare, but rather with a quiet assurance, the first two lines of "Femme noire" have asserted that the subject is nude and black, black the colour of life, and her figure the form of beauty. These critical standards established, less striking and more specific details follow. Always responsive to the tender, soothing hands on his brow, Senghor uses the recall of such a moment to introduce the sudden impact of the beauty of the black woman.

With the exception of the change from "black" to "dark" in the two middle sections, the first line of the poem becomes the opening refrain in all subsequent verse paragraphs. The surrealist imagery is sensual and daring in turn. From "firm-fleshed ripe fruit," "sombre raptures of black wine" and "mouth making lyrical my mouth," the associations dilate into the "savannah shuddering beneath the East Wind's eager caresses" and then contract to the "carved tom-tom, taut tom-tom" muttering in a "solemn contralto voice."

As a rule, Senghor's most successful poems depend on correspondences and contradictions, on ambiguity and paradox. "Femme noire" is no exception. The provocative refrain seems to indicate that the emotion is mere eroticism, the celebrant poised, in Eliot's phrase, "between the desire and the spasm"; yet in its development, even if one allows for the apparent flights of fancy and fortuitousness of the surrealist imagery, very little if any physical passion for the woman is manifested. In the second section of the poem where the images are the most sensual, no attempt is made to exploit the woman's nudity, for, excepting the reference to her mouth in "mouth making lyrical my mouth" and "your solemn contralto voice" her beauty is not in any way inventoried. In the third section, only her skin, hair and eyes are mentioned, after which the descriptions once again become generalities.

In "Femme noire" Senghor invokes the universal black woman who has many guises in black poetry.[9] She has been described as a beautiful virgin of royal stock in pastoral poetry, as a suffering but steadfast Mother Africa in typically anti-slavery and anti-oppression poetry, as a voluptuous woman linked to the fertility principle in some modern poetry (including poetry of Negritude) that utilizes traditional African concepts. Sometimes two or more roles are combined in a single poem. In this regard, the poet who most readily comes to mind is David Diop who, in two poems, "Afrique, à ma mère" and "A une danseuse noire" depicts the black woman as having several of these functions. In Senghor's poem, the images are subtly suggestive of a variety of roles, but ultimately it is the portrait of the universal woman that stands out, invested with the many attributes of various manifestations. The origin of these mythical conceptions of African woman Senghor ascribes to the transformation of a "fait économico-social" in the essay "Eléments constitutifs d'une civilisation d'inspiration négro-africaine" presented at the Second Congress of Black Artists and Writers:

> In Black Africa, Woman holds, or rather used to hold, first place, since Arabo-Berber and European influences and the influence of nomadic civilization have continually reduced her role. This role is explained by the agrarian character of the black world. The explanation is correct but it goes beyond that. As always, consciousness has translated socio-economic fact into myth. Because the woman is "permanent" in the family and life-giver (donneuse de vie) she has been elevated as source of the life-force (source de force vitale) and guardian of the home, that is, repository of the past and guarantor of the clan's future.[10]

The idealization of black woman in traditional Africa is seen by Senghor as a parallel to a similar idealization by the Negro American poets of the "New Negro" movement. The philosophy of these poets who precede and influence poets of Negritude is outlined in another essay, "La Poésie négro-africaine." Senghor cites Claude Mackay, Countee Cullen, Langston Hughes and Gwendolyn Bennett among the contemporary poets (1950) who embrace this concept which he summarizes as follows:

> These [poets] are convinced that they contribute, with the new values, a fresh sap which will make American Civilization blossom once again. And they possess their own special cult consisting of respect and love, of desire and adoration for *Black Woman* as symbol of Negritude. This is because Woman is, more so than Man, sensitive to the mysterious currents of life and of the cosmos and more susceptible to joy and sorrow. . . . Woman is indeed symbol. In Africa none of her traits escapes the poet whose goal is, beyond the revelation of her classic beauty, to manifest her spiritual richness.[11]

Whatever spiritual wealth the woman of Senghor's poem has is expressed in images relating to the world of nature and thus to the life principle, since, in African ontology, the physical and spiritual unite in a common hierarchy. Consequently, the elemental imagery in the two middle verse paragraphs of "Femme noire" is full of suggestions of ripeness and maturity, of desire and embrace amid drumming and spiritual song, and of cosmic forces at work:

Naked woman, dark woman
Firm-fleshed ripe fruit, sombre raptures of black wine, mouth making
lyrical my mouth
Savannah stretching to clear horizons, savannah shuddering beneath
the East Wind's eager caresses
Carved tom-tom, taut tom-tom, muttering under the Conqueror's fingers
Your solemn contralto voice is the spiritual song of the Beloved.

Naked woman, dark woman
Oil that no breath ruffles, calm oil on the athlete's flanks, on the
flanks of the Princes of Mali
Gazelle limbed in Paradise, pearls are stars on the night of your skin
Under the shadow of your hair, my care is lightened by the neighbouring
suns of your eyes. (*PO* 16-17, *PP* 105-6).

At the beginning of his "Orphée noir" which served as the preface to Senghor's anthology of poetry in 1948, Sartre makes the following remark about Senghor's "Femme noire":

> A black poet--unconcerned with us--whispers to the woman he loves:
>
> Naked woman, black woman
> Dressed in your color which is life. . . .
> Naked woman, dark woman,
> Firm fleshed ripe fruit, somber ecstasies of black wine.
>
> and our whiteness seems to us to be a strange livid varnish that keeps our skin from breathing--white tights, worn out at the elbows and knees, under which we would find real human flesh the color of black wine if we could remove them.[12]

A recent critic, S. O. Mezu, in his penetrating study of Senghor entitled *Léopold Senghor et la defense et illustration de la civilisation noire* has remarked that the poem is "too often quoted and as badly commented upon since the majority of critics see nothing in this poem but the 'special cult consisting of respect and love, of desire and adoration for *Black Woman*.'"[13] Mezu adds that Sartre's interpretation goes beyond the meaning of the superficial lines of the poem in which elements of racism are present with or without the poet's awareness. He further points out that European writers like Dante, Petrarch and Spenser, since they did not think of race in their exaltation of white woman are not guilty of racism, and concludes with a statement about the failure of the poem as an inspired work of art that celebrates black woman as symbol of Negritude:

> The poem expresses a disincarnated emotion, an adoration without real love, a contemplation without the desire for possession, a simple eroticism. This dry desire for a generic woman indicates the lack of spontaneity and personal attachment. The writing is far from spontaneous let along automatic. . . . This poem is neither very personal nor very inspired. It is a beautiful painting which is a trifle cold, marvelously vivid, but in which the disengaged artist has put little of himself.[14]

The problem with Mezu's critique is that it is not so much an independent analysis of the poem as an acceptance (with some reservations) of Sartre's claim of "anti-racist racism" without allowing that the poem is inspired. It is his reluctance to credit a work that is race oriented with serious artistic quality that leads him to conclude that the poem lacks warmth and is the product of a disengaged artist, while he concedes that it is a "beautiful painting" and "marvelously vivid." And since Senghor's claim that African art is *engagé* is well known, to assert that he is disengaged from the poem is as much as to say that it is not an African poem in the best tradition. The fact remains, however, that on internal evidence this is one of the least racially inspired poems of *Chants d'ombre* if the reader willingly suspends judgment based on such poems as "Neige sur Paris" and "Prière aux Masques" which have racial undertones, and considers "Femme noire" on its own merits. Then he would find the poem so richly connotative that the label of racist or disengaged or uninspired becomes hasty and narrow. Indeed, a careful reading of the poem reveals that the woman being sung is, beyond the immediate profile, an exquisitely sculptured African statue carved in the "verbal alchemy of African poems."[15]

Apart from the parenthetic remark by Senghor in a passage already cited that in Africa woman is a symbol whose plastic beauty is noticed in all its facets by the poet and the verbal echo in "Carved tom-tom" within the poem itself, Senghor has a penchant for casting the black woman in many of his poems in the *immobilité mobile* of the African mask--a tendency that is particularly evident in *Chants pour Naëtt*. These songs were almost certainly inspired by an actual black woman. The following lines represent the most striking example:

Your brows have taken that Eternal stance found on the faces of statues
But there flutters about your mask the bright wing of the seamew.
It is that haunting smile, like the leitmotiv of your melodic face.
(*PO* 179, *NO* 14).

Further evidence that he identifies the living flesh of the black woman with the solid statue comes from a comparison of some of the images in the poem with a prose passage from the essay, "L'esprit de la civilisation." In it Senghor, appraising a feminine statuette of the Baoulé, comments on the "two themes of sweetness [which] sing alternately," namely, "the ripe fruits of the breasts" as well as the fruits of the neck, knees, crest and calves; and the columns of black honey. Other particulars from a *Fang* statuette and a

Bambara mask-antelope include fruits of breasts, navel and knees, curved cylinders of bust, legs and thighs, strophe of horns and ears and antistrophe of "the hair of a mane arising from the imagination of the sculptor."[16] The two alternating themes are reminiscent of the "firm-fleshed ripe fruit" and "sombre raptures of black wine" in "Femme noire" and they delineate the contours of the body that are adumbrated in the poem. For their part, the images of the mask-antelope associate with the "Gazelle limbed in Paradise," thus sanctifying the woman in her role as totem-ancestor. The apparently fortuitous imagery of the poem is in fact carefully ordered to project an archetypal being whom Senghor decides to "fix in the Eternal, / Before jealous Fate turn you to ashes to feed the roots of life."

A detailed study of "Femme noire" in terms of Senghor's African aesthetics is of value in approaching the kindred poem "Masque nègre." In this poem, the identity of the figure as a mask is one of the *données* supplied in the very title. In contrast with the expectation of a frigid, immobile and lifeless piece of sculpture the poem introduces the black mask as a sleeping woman, individualized as Koumba Tam. The ambience is somewhat reminiscent of the peacefulness that informs the atmosphere of "Nuit de Sine" which is placed earlier in *Chants d'ombre:*

She sleeps peacefully in sombre purity.
Koumba Tam sleeps. A green palm veils the fever of the hair, coppers
    the curved forehead
The closed eyelids, double cups and sealed sources.
This subtle crescent, this lip just a little blacker and thicker--
    from which comes the smile of the privy woman?
The patens of the cheeks and the design of the chin sing in silent

accord.
Mask's face closed to the ephemeral, without eyes, without substance
Perfect bronze head and its patina of time
Untainted by varnish, blush, wrinkle trace of tears or kisses
O face as God created you even before the memory of ages
Face of the world's dawn, do not lay yourself open like a tender pass
to move my flesh
I adore you, O Beauty, with my monochord eye!
(*PO* 17-18).

Once again we have a carefully ordered setting, for Koumba Tam is none other than the goddess of beauty among the Serers, Senghor's own people. The tone of this poem is one of quiet adoration from which the projected sensuality of "Femme noire" is virtually excluded. The preoccupation is instead, with the etching of the lineaments of the face of the goddess which achieve a perfect symmetry: "the patens of the cheeks, the design of the chin sing in silent accord."

Since the poem is dedicated to Picasso who early recognized and was influenced by black art forms, the first half of the poem emphasizes the lines, curves and accents of the face of the sleeping goddess, Koumba Tam, whose features are the ultimate in perfection and grace. The transition comes when both the sleeping goddess and the human form she takes are crystallized to form the bronze head of the mask in the form and style of God's original model created "even before the memory of ages." Because the mask is made of bronze that ages, it is not without its "patina of time," but it is not subject to human caresses and emotions; nevertheless the original vision of the sleeping human form has been so appealing that at the end Senghor implores the mask-goddess not to come alive and move him to a purely lustful contemplation.

In his *Léopold Sédar Senghor, l'Homme et l'Oeuvre* Armant Guibert perceptively comments on the poem's architecture as it combines the social and the sacred in a "double current." "Since this poem of youth," he writes,

> Senghor has revealed the double current which animates the African genius: on the one hand the influence of the flesh perceptible in the play of colours and forms, and, on the other, the cult of the sacred whose images are only a lining and a semblance. Starting with a sensual evocation which still throbs with a residue of life ("the fever of the hair," "the curved forehead"), he then suggests the silence ("silent accord") and the intemporal character of the form he contemplates ("closed to the ephemeral . . . without eyes, without substance").[17]

We have already seen the "double current" at work in "Femme noire," where sensual images predominate. In "Masque nègre" the emphasis is on the religious, as the poet pays humble tribute to the goddess who, reflecting the image of the original model, is "face of the world's dawn," and therefore already fixed in the eternal. Much of the imagery adorns the mask-goddess with an aura of divinity or with a sense of permanence as well as of peace. "Double cups" and "the patens of the cheeks," for example, in their association with the chalice and the silver platter recall the celebration of the Eucharist, a ritualistic and symbolic re-enactment of the act of sacrifice. And sacrifice is a fundamentally integral part of African religious worship.

The paradoxes of "Masque nègre" stem from the symbiosis of three entities--woman, ancestral mask and deity--so that the figure is both human and divine, dead and alive, form and essence, bronze mask and human flesh. Woman as symbol of life-giving forces and the statue as symbol of the ancestors are here combined with a third principle, the goddess, constituting three entities closely associated in the African sensibility.

According to African ontology, the whole universe is composed of vital forces forming a hierarchy in which God, the Supreme Force, is at the apex and the grain of sand or the pebble at the base. Man is the centre of this physical and spiritual universe which he spans through the help of his ancestors. In an early essay, "Ce que l'homme noir apporte," Senghor points to the fact that African man invests the whole cosmos with a "human presence" which includes the tree and the pebble as well as natural phenomena and the animal world.[18]

The sculptured masks and statues are representations of the dead ancestors who are not dead, and of the spirit-gods. They are "at the same time symbol and dwelling. They capture and make the personal felt as effective will and give rise to the *surreal*."[19] When the wearer of the mask performs the dance of the deity whom the mask represents he takes on the power of the god, becomes the living presence of the god.

In "Prière aux masques" Senghor, as poet of Negritude, shows his concern with the white world. The title suggests that the poem is a prayer to the gods and spirits who watch over his race. It is more than just a prayer, however, for it contains a basic statement of Senghor's poetic credo.

An obvious distinction of "Prière aux masques" is that unlike "Femme noire" and "Masque nègre" not one but several masks are involved and their summons from the four cardinal points stresses the importance of the occasion:

> Black mask, red mask, you black-and-white masks
> Masks of the four points from which the Spirit breathes
> I greet you in silence!
> (*PO* 23-24).

Senghor scrupulously follows the alphabetic order in his salutation to the masks--"*B*lack mask, *r*ed mask, you *b*lack-and-*w*hite masks"--as he paints them in black, red and white, the colours of traditional Africa. His greeting is a silent one of reverence in a place whose very air smacks of eternity in its isolation from all contact with the profane.

Although the primary intent of the invocation is a plea to the masks, something of their character is revealed in the last lines of the preliminary address which takes up half the poem:

> You distill this air of eternity in which I breathe the air of my Fathers.
> Masks with faces without mask, free from all dimples and wrinkles
> You who have composed this portrait, this face of mine bent over the
> altar of white paper
> In your own image, hear me! (*PO* 23).

In these lines is something of the paradox inherent in the African mystique, at least from a Western standpoint. In African art the mask is a symbolic representation of the human face, which is, in Senghor's words, "the most faithful reflection of the soul."[20] Far from hiding or disguising the identity beyond it, the sacred African mask reveals in its form and texture the character of the deity it represents. The sacred masks in this poem are therefore "without mask" because they illumine the presence of the very founders of the race. There is on the one hand an image-analogy between the face of the suppliant and the sacred mask-Fathers who have modelled his face, and on the other a contrast between his own face and the "altar of white paper," which is consecrated because it is used to record the prayer to the masks.

Following the appeal for the masks' kindly audience, Senghor proceeds to the prayer proper. The subsequent six lines of the poem present black Africa and white Europe as objective correlatives:

> See the Africa of empires dying--it is the agony of a pitiful princess
> And Europe too to whom we are linked by the navel.
> Fix your immobile eyes on your children who receive orders
> Who give away their lives like the poor man his last garment.
> Let us answer "Present!" at the rebirth of the world
> As the leaven that the white flour needs. (*PO* 23).

The future of the two continents is inextricably linked because they have the same life line. Thus the death of Africa, the proud and pitiful princess, also spells doom for Europe. The African empires which held sway up to the nineteenth century have been disintegrating under European influence and the Second World War threatens the life of Europe torn by an inward struggle, a struggle in which the black man has been called upon to sacrifice his life for peace. But after this physical death, a new world will be born in which Africa will again have a key function, "[a]s the leaven that the white flour needs."

This last phrase suggests that the black man will be charged with the task of infusing a spiritual essence into a world that is for all practical purposes white--and sterile. There ensues an elaboration of the black man's role in a question and answer situation followed by an affirmation of that role:

> For who will teach rhythm to the world laid low by machines and cannons
> Who will shout with joy to wake up the dead and the orphans at the dawn?
> Say, who will give back the memory of life to the man with eviscerated
> hopes?
> They call us cotton men, coffee men oily men
> They call us men of death.
> We are the men of the dance, whose feet regain force by drumming on
> the hard earth. (*PO* 24).

The implication here is that only the black man who has maintained a constant connection with the world of nature and the world of spirits can fulfil this vital task, for the white man, in his preoccupation with a machine civilization, has brought the world to ruin by this very machine. The Negro, who has up till the present been the downtrodden of the earth will then become the hero and the apostle of the dawn of tomorrow's world. He will make it rise, phoenix-like, from its own ashes.

The assertion of the black man's contribution is made with full awareness of his current existential position. He has many stereotypes, all of them revealing a bias above all against his colour, which forces on him a myth of inferiority. Ironically Senghor reverts to a European myth, that of the Greek Antaeus, to make his final postulate about the black man's identity as well as about his role: "We are the men of the dance, whose feet regain force by pounding on the hard earth."

The Messianic note of much poetry of Negritude is present in the questions that are posed in "Prière aux masques." The apocalyptic day of destruction caused by the machines of white culture is to be followed by a day of resurrection achieved through the rhythmic flow of sap from a "civilisation sans machine." Inasmuch as rhythm is the correlative principle of death and life and similar dualities only beings endowed with it can infuse the vital sap into the deadened nerve centre of occidental civilization. According to Senghor, the Negro reigns supreme in the domain of rhythm; consequently, it will be his duty to teach the resuscitated world the rhythm of life and to announce the Good News in the impending dawn--an honour he has by virtue of his retention of the vital link with the cosmic forces ruling the universe as he dances the dance of the world.

What Senghor seems to have done in "Prière aux masques" is to accept part of the Negro stereotype which he then modifies at the same time as he tacitly rejects the other half. The physical characteristics of the Negro ("cotton men coffee men oily men") which also refer to his humble or peasant status have been sublimated in "Femme noire" and "Masque nègre." What cannot be accepted here is that black is the colour of death; for Senghor, black is the colour of life, and the blackness of the Negro has this special significance for him in marked contrast with the white man's identification of black with death. In any event death and life are twin aspects of the same reality. In particular, in Africa "there is no irreducible opposition between life and death."[21] As "men of the dance," therefore, the black race engages in a dance celebrating the renewing cycle of life and death.

The tone and attitude of "Totem" differ from those at work in the other mask-poems. From the sensuality of "Femme noire," the worship of "Masque nègre," and the homily of "Prière aux masques," all of which have a serious outlook, Senghor's mood alters in "Totem" where he speaks in a detached, ironic vein. Hitherto he has captured imaginatively the presence of the masks which disclose a reality that goes beyond the surface to the essence. Here he must hide this very presence because of his self-conscious attempt to ward off charges of barbarism by the "civilized" races:

I must hide in the intimate depths of my veins
The Ancestor storm-dark skinned, shot with lightning and thunder
And my guardian animal, I must hide him
Lest I smash through the boom of scandal.
He is my faithful blood and demands fidelity
Protecting my naked pride against
Myself and all the insolence of lucky races. (*PO* 24, *PP* 108).

The irony in these lines is one of the few instances of humour in Senghor's poetry. The ancestor coursing in his blood is reminiscent of the dead of "In Memoriam" "who have always refused to die." Senghor is already isolated from the white men of Europe because of his black skin. To reveal himself to his white brothers as a barbarian who worships animals, like Laye's father in *L'Enfant noir*, would only widen their distance from him. In this case the totem ancestor is not externalized as in the other mask-poems. It is part of the poet's blood which he must protect even against his own attempts to compromise it by his anxiety to communicate with the insolence of more fortunate races. The irony inherent in the poem becomes all the more pointed when one recalls these words of the

Prince who proclaims the Good News in "Le Message":

> Children with short heads, what did the koras sing to you?
> You decline *rosa*, *rosae*, the rose and your Ancestors the Gauls.
> You are doctors of the Sorbonne, weighed down with diplomas . . ."
> (*PO* 19).

Under the French assimilationist policy the textbooks used in metropolitan France were prescribed also for Overseas France, and swarthy French subjects in the colonies found themselves descendants of the rose-pink Gauls.

"Neige sur Paris" develops the theme of the unique qualities of the black man introduced in "Prière aux masques." At the same time its tone and mood are in contrast with those of "Nuit de Sine" or "Joal." In contrast with the tranquility, warmth and life of the African décor in the earlier poems we have instead violence, frigidity and death. The poem is an address to Christ because it is Christmas Day--"this day of your birth"--but there is scant evangelism in its tone. The pivotal symbol which operates throughout the poem is that of the ambivalent colour, white--"white snow," "white death," "white hands." In muted contrast we have also the colours black and brown in "black flesh," "brown hands," which amplify the central idea. Both intrinsic and extrinsic qualities are brought into play as the poet uses the snow on Christmas Day in Paris to embody the themes of transgression and forgiveness, of impurity and purification.

The main paradox in the employment of snow as a unifying metaphor lies in the fact that it sharply contrasts with the purifying *warmth* of Christ's love. The juxtaposition of "incorruptible cold" and "white death" produces a striking effect which establishes the ambivalence of the symbol:

Lord, you have visited Paris on this day of your birth
Because it was becoming mean and wicked
You have purified it by incorruptible cold
By white death. (*PO* 21, *SP* 7).

The metaphor is extended to include the snow-covered factory chimneys which thus represent white flags, symbols of peaceful surrender:

This morning, even the factory chimneys that sing in unison
Flying white flags
--"Peace to Men of goodwill."

If this cure seems a harsh cure, the subsequent development of the poem is designed to show that it is the efficacious one for a harsh, unfeeling world divided by wickedness and vice. The Christian way to salvation has always been fraught with suffering and death, the death of the old self, but it has always been weighed against the rewards that will be gained at the end. Senghor's poem, apart from the promise of peace, holds no such hope. Instead, it focuses on some of the bitter realities of Europe's relations with Africa and equates the plight of suffering Africans with that of Christ.

The antithetic qualities of snow are given a new dimension when, in the second verse paragraph, Senghor introduces the notion of melting. For although the cold element in snow has a burning property superior to that of salt (the nearest comparison in both appearance and effect in the experience of the native of Joal), under the influence of heat in the fire of the sun the snow thaws and melts, shedding its burning quality and its colour. (It is ironical that it also loses, in the process of melting, both its preservative and destructive characteristics.) By means of this extended metaphor we have been able to appraise both the extrinsic property of snow, namely its whiteness, as well as its intrinsic characteristics, those of burning and melting. The new element is introduced for a particular purpose. It is not the heart of Europe that melts but that of the poet. This change enables him to forget the misdeeds done to him as a representative of his race:

And I forget
White hands that fired the shots which brought the empires crumbling
Hands that flogged the slaves, that flogged You
Chalk-white hands that buffeted You, powdered painted hands that
    buffeted me
Confident hands that delivered me to solitude to hatred. . .
(*PO* 22, *SP* 7).

But the willed amnesia only emphasizes the perpetrated crimes Senghor wishes to forgive. The catalogue of crimes ends on a note of bitterness:

They cut down the dark forest for railway sleepers
They cut down the forests of Africa to save Civilization, for
    there was a shortage of human raw-material.

In the process the attributive whiteness of snow has been transferred to Europe which is represented by "white hands." On account of the deeds credited to these hands the symbol of whiteness loses its essential purity. The hands become "chalk-white hands," "powdered painted hands," a mere camouflage for the evil that they shroud.

In contrast with these hands of pillage, slaughter and flagellation are the "brown hands" of God whose suffering and death have been identified with the lot of the African, as earlier mentioned. Just as Christ's life was bartered almost two thousand years ago, so the hypocritical diplomats whose wide smiles hide their inner viciousness will barter black flesh, now become synonymous with goodness and charity. In this final strophe of the poem the poet again relents in his hatred for the white world. The image of the sun melting the snow of his heart is reintroduced to confirm the message promised in the first movement--Christ's message of peace and good will to all men.

Yet, in the light of the identity he creates in the main body of the poem on the one hand between whiteness and oppression, and on the other, between blackness and gentleness it is difficult to accept that the incorruptible cold, the white death about which we learn in the opening lines could have so readily been quickened "[u]nder the sun of Your gentleness." For as Armand Guibert has written,

> although written in a tone of prayer (each strophe commences with an invocation to the Lord, and a line repeats a saying of Christ: "Peace to Men of goodwill!") the poem associates, in its central section, the colour white with the tyranny of European peoples. [The poet's] litany of woes inspired by their embezzlement is recited in a tone of rancour and irony. . . .[22]

The bitter tone, the accusatory finger Senghor points at all of Europe, the sarcasm in the reference to Africa's supplying of human fodder for the benefit of European civilization, all these have a dampening effect on the magnanimity of acceptance, on the forbearance of hatred.

What has happened is that we have in "Neige sur Paris" the clearest indication so far of the inversion of values of the "two antagonistic worlds" of Africa and Europe. Not only is God black, but also charity, gentleness, self-sacrifice and goodness are black, or at least not-white. The exiled poet in Europe sees in the cold of snowy winter a convenient vehicle for expressing his posited disenchantment with white values and, by contrast, for vindicating the values of the black race. The apostolic role of the Negro poet and spokesman for his race is a development from the mask-poem "Prière aux masques," where the importance of the black man's role in world reconstruction is suggested through rhetorical questions and asserted in the image of men dancing in tune with the earth.

Each of the poems of *Chants d'ombre* that have been discussed so far exposes one or more of Senghor's major themes. The poet's philosophic development is best illustrated by a grouping and ordering of related themes. The themes may be placed in three basic groups--isolation in exile, the ancestors and masks as symbol of a glorious past and a great culture, and themes of Negritude (that embrace the themes in the other two groupings) which assert the black man's cultural values, charge Europe with criminal exploitation, or suggest the possibility of a reconciliation between Europe and Africa.

Senghor has described his poetry as poetry of a Childhood Kingdom and indeed there is a constant return to childhood in *Chants d'ombre*--a return that recurs, though less frequently, in the subsequent volumes of poetry. The return *motif* complements the theme of exile--exile from self, from the past (childhood or ancestral), from the wellspring of culture--and unifies the subthemes in each category. Generally speaking the poems I have called mask-poems ("Femme noire," "Masque nègre," "Prière aux masques" and "Totem") explore the second group of themes. There is, inevitably, some overlap. The ancestors, for instance, are invoked in the very first poem "In Memoriam" and again in "Nuit de Sine." In "In Memoriam" they ambiguously signify dreams, unyielding qualities of blood, guardian as well as haunting spirits, while in "Nuit de Sine" they virtually have human substance and entertain all too human fears: "Listen to the voice of the ancients of Elissa. Exiled like us / They have never wanted to die, to let the torrent of their seed be lost in the sands" (*PO* 14-15, *PP* 104). But in the mask-poems the importance of the ancestors as spiritual entities and of the gods as sources of power and life is unquestionable. In addition, the masks, contemplated by the poet as artifacts of African culture and tradition, provide a valid reference for the inherited culture of the black man. In many of his essays and speeches Senghor has demonstrated that plastic African art is a highly stylized medium through which the artist expresses in abstract terms the profundity of the African mind. The statues and masks thus constitute both the entelechy of African religious thought and the manifestation of a centuries-old art, the art of ancient kingdoms and empires. The rediscovery of their great heritage enabled Senghor and other poets of Negritude to make spiritual pilgrimages to the shrines of the past in wonder, love and praise. It also inspired confidence, self-identity and pride among them as deracinated intellectuals of African descent and accounts for the assertive pride of race that they exhibit in much of their poetry.

The third group of themes deals with the vindication of a black culture of African origin. The first indication of this development occurs in "Neige sur Paris." In this poem Senghor implicitly identifies the black race as direct descendants of Christ and then lists the sufferings that this revered Ancestor and his successors--including, of course, the poet himself--have endured at the hands of white oppressors. In another poem, "Prière aux Masques," Senghor seeks to vindicate the black aesthetic by imploring the masks he invokes to make Africa's children the leaven of the world. In this poem the announcement of the world's rebirth is the first proclamation of the good news of Negritude to be found in Senghor's poetry. The announcement coincides with the rejection of the white man's stereotypes of the black man ("coffee men cotton men oily men") and the projection of a black identity ("men of the dance"). During this non-constructive phase of Negritude[23] Senghor viewed the black man's role as superior and thus did not picture the black and white races as equal partners of a new world order.

The three divisions of themes are, in the final analysis, integral parts of the general theme of Negritude which begins with alienation and passes through the rediscovery of self and origin or sources to climax in the assertion of pride of self and of race and origin. The last two sub-divisions of themes, rediscovery and self-assertion, depend, however, on the first: alienation from self and country, from cultural roots, from a world of white men and from the splendours of childhood. These themes celebrate exile which is matched by a return in Negritude poetry.[24] In Senghor's poetry the return is both spiritual and physical. Similar contemplations in the shorter lyrics apart, the two epic poems of *Chants d'ombre*, "Que m'accompagnent koras et balafong" and "Le Retour de l'Enfant prodigue," depict this return of the wanderer in imagination and in reality.

Four major movements, each covering two of the poem's nine sections, are discernible in "Que m'accompagnent koras et balafong." In the first movement Senghor evokes his lost childhood paradise in Africa. There are no definitive divisions of time: events become blurred in his memory and he asks "What were the months? What was the year?" (*PO* 28, *PP* 109). He is however able to distinguish between his earliest years of abandon and his years at the Catholic seminary to which his father sent him, despite his mother's protests, at the age of seven. The second movement portrays the conflict between the worlds of Africa and Europe within the psyche of the poet as the child of two worlds. Senghor finds himself "deliciously torn between . . . two friendly hands"--those of the African Soukeina and the European Isabella. He is unable to tell which of them is his sister and which his foster sister, so close is his relationship with the two as representatives of

Africa and Europe. The choice between these competing claims has to be made and Senghor, the "shepherd of fair heads" at a Lycée in Paris, chooses, for the moment, the natural world of Africa.

In the third movement of "Que m'accompagnent koras et balafong" a return to the past is signalled, as before, by the questions "What were the months?" and "What was the year?" Senghor masks himself as the ancestor ("the grandfather of my grandfather"). He also identifies his father as the uncle of King Ndofene Dyouf, the administrator of Sine-Saloum. As the ancestor who is head of the house of Elissa of Gabu the poet recalls the sixteen years of war that ended in defeat but not dishonour. He also remarks that one of his two daughters is the mother of Sira Badral, the legendary foundress of the Serer people whom he apostrophizes in the fourth movement. Setting aside the mantle of ancestor in this movement, he praises Sira Badral's beauty and then implores her to wash him clean "from all contagions of civilized man" (*PO* 35, *PP* 114); but almost in the same breath he proclaims his black ancestors as scholars on a level with the hyperboreans of Egypt and identifies himself with the royal Pharoahs. Soon after this identification, however, he makes the first allusion to the peasant nobility of the Negro—a theme that looms large in *Hosties noires*. This fluctuation between royalty and peasantry demonstrates Senghor's self-conscious wrestling with the image of the black man's inferiority fastened on him by Europeans and with the image of descent from a royal stock which he tries to project as best, and as often, as he can. In his characteristic way he accepts for the Negro a priority over the Caucasian in the order of creation and asserts that by the same token the Negro is an original model closer to God.

In contrast with his method in "Neige sur Paris," it is near the end of the poem that Senghor first castigates Europe in "Que m'accompagnent koras et balafong." The accusations against Europe for her past sins are revived from earlier poems, but the reference to Europe's sufferings in World War II are confined to the two epic poems in *Chants d'ombre*. The references to past misdeeds and present suffering in "Que m'accompagnent" are sandwiched between other concerns: between enumerations of the noble qualities of Senghor's seven thousand new Negroes and between these enumerations and the statement of the poet's final redescent into the Childhood Kingdom. In the concluding scene of the poem Senghor, now wearing the mask of a little child, addresses his uncle Waly who is able to interpret for his nephew the mysteries of things because he has joined the ancestors. But it is with Mother Africa that the poem ends, with the mystical African night as an ancestral mask that keeps watch over "the child who is still a child" (*PO* 37, *PP* 116). Although the saga of the Serers is portrayed in the third movement, the image of the child predominates and makes "Que m'accompagnent" more an ode to departed childhood splendours relived in the imagination than a heroic legend of the African race.

"Que m'accompagnent" celebrates a return from exile after twelve years. The return in its companion poem "Le Retour de l'Enfant prodigue," takes place after sixteen years of wandering in Europe. The welcome of this prodigal is different from the joyful reception given to the biblical model. Senghor's father is dead and there is silence around his grave; the courtyards and the house which used to vibrate with life are deserted; the only person to greet him is a herdsman who leads him to his father's grave. The "Ancestors still present, who rule in pride the great hall of [their] masks defying Time" provide the greater welcome to the wanderer. In his recall of the pomp of the kings of Sine and the brave warriors of old, Senghor invokes the animal ancestor, the Elephant of the sacred grove at Mbissel. The invocation is a prelude to a prayer addressed to the ancestors in which Senghor refers to his humble status as soldier in the Second World War. It is one of the themes of complaint that will be amplified in *Hosties noires*. Senghor juxtaposes this complaint about neglect with the first account of his dreams of fellowship with the very "white brothers" who now neglect him. He also rejoices at the closing down of shops and other businesses around his father's dwelling as these represent the civilization of Western man which becomes sticky mud under the feet: "I clap, I burst out clapping! Let bankruptcy thrive." (*PO* 50, *PP* 120). The son of the soil wishes to revive the pastoral activities of the past including neighing herds, hip-swaying maidservants carrying calabashes of milk, rolling caravans of asses and dromedaries. He again invokes the Elephant of Mbissel, this time in order to request for himself the wisdom of the ancient doctors of Timbuktu, among other things, for he wishes to become Master of Language and Ambassador of the black people. At the end of this reverie the poet contemplates having his mother tuck him once again in the "fresh bed of . . . childhood" (*PO* 52, *PP* 121) but homesick for his black land he quickly returns to the present and to the eve of his departure for France.

Senghor's Negritude, as exemplified in "Le Retour de l'Enfant prodigue," differs somewhat from Césaire's practice in his *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal*. Unlike Senghor's Childhood Kingdom, Césaire's Martinique, the *pays natal* of the poem, is a land of hunger and misery and thus a living witness to the exploitation of his race. While in physical exile in France, Senghor makes a continual spiritual return to his homeland but the return is always to the glory and the dream of a child's world or to splendid scenes of a fabled past whose royal personages become his blood relations. The *status quo* in the homeland captured in grim and vivid detail is one that Césaire self-mockingly identifies with to the very soul of his being; for Senghor, the present state of his homeland is without life or interest as it does not support, at close quarters, the mental picture he had preserved of it. He must therefore revive the virtues of the past in an attempt to bring back its glamour and must return to France to contemplate anew the past glories that he has vainly sought in the real Senegal both in this poem and in the earlier poem "Tout le long du jour."

The exotic and lyrical qualities of the poetry of *Chants d'ombre* is perhaps the feature that has been most attractive to Western readers of Senghor's poetry. The ancestors and the masks are given pre-eminence in this volume of poems and although they recur in subsequent volumes their presence is not felt as much as it is in *Chants d'ombre* where whole poems are devoted to their contemplation. *Chants d'ombre* is also one of the most artistically arranged collections of Senghor's poems and readily lends itself to the explication of the poet's themes. Notwithstanding Guibert's statement that the poems are poems of youth, this first volume of poems originally appeared in print in 1945 when Senghor was almost forty years old and his basic ideas were already set. Themes of Negritude are paramount in these poems and the examination of the development of such themes has been made in the light of Senghor's own ideas about the elusive philosophy of Negritude and about African philosophy which, according to him, subsumes Negritude under the name of Africanity.

Senghor's poetry of the Childhood Kingdom has appealed to those readers who appreciate poems of innocence and idyllic splendour. But as is usual with such poetry, it has been equally revolting to poets and critics who view this return to the child's world as an escape from the present and its very real challenges. In addition, the reader who cannot vicariously share in this return is apt to view the longing and regret with distaste. Unfortunately, Senghor seems to be almost incapable of writing poetically about practical issues of the moment. His two epic poems which celebrate the return to homeland deal prosaically with the present and have to turn back in time to procure the least energy. The only exception is his bitter denunciation of Western capitalism; but this denunciation only leads to his reactionary plan, in "Que m'accompagnent," to turn modernized areas into a pastoral scene once more.

The two epics act as a bridge between *Chants d'ombre* and *Hosties noires*. The Second World War is the backdrop of the great majority of the poems of *Hosties noires* but Senghor speaks in these poems in a passive rather than in an active voice. He speaks not of active combat but, *inter alia*, of the warrior dead, of his own status as a second class soldier instead of a holder of officer's rank to which his *Agrégé* entitled him, of the role of the black warriors as sacrificial victims and as scourges. The next chapter will be concerned with this phase of Senghor's Negritude.

Chapter II

Hosties noires: From Sacrificial Victim to Scarifier

While *Chants d'ombre* is concerned with the poet's personal history and the fortune of his people, the Serers (this fortune extends to embrace all Africa and ultimately all black men everywhere), *Hosties noires* focuses on an event contemporaneous with the period of its creation, namely the Second World War. The presence of war overshadows the concerns Senghor is expressing, concerns that are essentially the same as those put forward in *Chants d'ombre*. These include an assertion of his identity and that of black peoples through the glorification of the black cultural heritage; a demonstration of the contribution of the black man to universal culture; and most importantly a supplanting of the white value system based on the notion of white supremacy by a black system that rests on the supposed superiority of black culture. Senghor defends the reversal of values with another assertion. He claims that his ultimate aim is to unite the races under a kind of democratic world culture which would be an amalgam of salient ingredients from all existing cultures. His double allegiance to Africa and to Europe has resulted in a number of paradoxes which will be examined and illustrated in the poems of *Hosties noires*.

The title of Senghor's second volume of poetry, *Hosties noires*, establishes the main metaphor with which Senghor characterizes the black soldiers from Africa and America. In his view, the "black victims" of World War II are playing out the final movement of a dark symphony begun centuries before during slavery. Just as in "Masque nègre" he invests an African goddess with Christian religious attributes through the reference to the chalice and patens of the Holy Sacrament, so in this work he associates the whole black race with the sacred host of the Eucharist. That they are *black* hosts or victims only emphasizes the daring inversions of colour and attribute that Senghor has ventured upon. The association of the black race with the supreme sacrifice symbolized in the Christian ritual of Communion is an idea already established in *Chants d'ombre*.

Following the introductory poem in *Hosties noires* there is the epic poem "A l'appel de la race de Saba" which properly opens the collection. The background of the poem is filled with the war in Ethiopia which was a prelude to the Second World War. During this war black people were once more battling for their lives against the tyranny and oppression of white European culture. Thus, while the poem is an address to his own mother, Senghor's impulse actually comes from the appeal made by Ras Desta and others in the face of the Italian invasion of the nineteen thirties.[1]

The substance of the poem, at least in its earlier sections, deals with Senghor's own predicament. In the face of his mother's anger at his nine years "desertion" when he was a "prisoner of all the inextricable anxieties that encumber [him]" he harks back to familiar scenes of childhood when all was happiness and peace:

Bless you, Mother.
I remember the days of my fathers, the evenings of Dyilor
That deep-blue light of the night sky on the land sweet at evening.
I am on the steps of the homestead. Deep inside it is dark.
My brothers and sisters like chicks huddle their numerous warmth against
    my heart.
I lay my head on the knees of my nurse, Nga, Nga the poetess
My heart pounding with the warrior gallop of the *dyoung-dyoungs*, great
    gallop of my blood my pure blood
My head melodious with the distant songs of Koumba the Orphan.[2]
(*PO* 58, *PP* 123).

In these lines we are taken to the heart of the Kingdom of Sine, Senghor's Childhood Kingdom, which is an ever-present landscape in the world of his poems.

The note of sacrifice is struck in the poem when the poet attempts to cleanse himself of the contagion of Western civilization. Again there is a renewal of a *motif* that finds its first expression in the two epic poems of *Chants d'ombre*, "Que m'accompagnent" and "Le Retour de l'Enfant prodigue" where these lines occur:

O desert shadowless desert, austere earth, pure earth, from all my
    pettiness
Wash me clean, from all contagions of civilized man.
("Que m'accompagnent," *PO* 35, *PP* 114).

> Faithful servant of my childhood, see my feet where the mud of
> Civilization sticks.
> Clean water for my feet, servant, and only their white soles on the
> mats of silence. ("Le Retour de l'Enfant prodigue," *PO* 48, *PP* 118).

In "A L'Appel de la race de Saba" the strengthening of his blood requires a more efficacious agent than clean water:

> Guardian geniuses, let me keep the savour of my blood from the insipidness of the *assimilado*, the civilized man.
> I bring as an offering a hen without blemish; though I have come late,
> I stand close to the Elder, so that before the creamy water and
> millet beer
> There will spurt up on me and on my sensual lips the hot salt blood of
> the bull in the strength of his age, in the fulness of his flesh.
> (*PO* 59, *PP* 124).

The sacrifice offered in this passage is consonant with the purpose for which it is made, that is, the protection of the poet's blood. It is also a foreshadowing of that greater sacrifice which the work as a whole celebrates: the sacrifice of human life for universal well-being.

It is in its middle portion that "A L'Appel" deals with the subject inherent in its title. After recalling to his mother two generations of colonization ("proconsular days") and nine years of his own exile Senghor declares his intention to "forge [his] vast and sounding tongue to be the echo and the trumpet of liberation." The cry of Ras Desta is seen as a rallying cry to all Africa under the yoke of oppression:

> For the mountain cry of the Ras Desta has gone through and through
> Africa like a long firm sword through the rottenness of its loins.[3]
> It has sounded above the trembling stuttering rage of the machine guns,
> defied the aeroplanes of the merchants
> And, listen, the long groaning, more desolate than a mother's long wail

> at the burying of a young man,
> Muffled, from the mines there in the farthest South. (*PO* 60, *PP* 125).

The images used here are worth noting. Ras Desta's cry has pierced Africa through and through, but it is not the heart of the "pitiful Princess" ("Prière aux masques") that is stricken. The sword has gone through "the dishonour of the loins" ("l'avilissement de ses reins") of Mother Africa herself, hence "the long groaning, more desolate than a mother's long wail at the burying of a young man."

In thus using a topical subject to introduce concerns that are at once personal and universal Senghor is employing a technique that he has used before with telling effect in some of his poems--the background of All Saints Day and All Souls Day in "In Memoriam," Christmas Day in "Neige sur Paris" are among the most pointed. Instead of addressing Italy or Europe directly Senghor declaims the poem as an address to his own mother. The apostrophe to his mother not only parallels that to Christ in "Neige sur Paris," but also blunts the true effect of the poem as a tirade against Europe. It also makes the descent into the lost world of childhood relevant by shifting the focus from Ethiopia to Senegal.

"A L'Appel" is not a significant poem if it is thought of as an address to Senghor's mother Nyilane. The poem "Ndessé" which occurs later in *Hosties noires* is perhaps more appealing, certainly more tender and more personal. In relation to the year of composition, 1936, the first most striking feature of the poem is its prophetic vision of a day of liberation "decked with fluttering lights like bright coloured flags and oriflammes" for the colonies. This vision is unquestionably inspired by the student political movements in Paris which were demanding self-determination for the French colonies in Africa and the West Indies. Independence was a wild dream at the time since the colonizing spirit was still not abated, as Italy's invasion of Ethiopia demonstrated. Although Senghor thinks ultimate victory is assured, nonetheless he is uncertain about the fate of those engaged in the struggle:

> Perhaps death is waiting for us on the hillside; there out of death,
> under a singing sun, grows life
> And victory . . . (*PO* 60, *PP* 126).

The second noteworthy feature is the extension of the peasant franchise (the black race according to Senghor is a peasant race) to embrace underprivileged people everywhere including Jews expelled from Germany, dock workers from Liverpool and workers from the mines of Asturia as well as Kaffirs, Kabyles, Somalis, Moors, Fans, Fons, Bambaras and Mandiagoes from Africa. This new breed of men will salute the dawn of a new day. The impending dawn is not simply the dawn of Negritude but of a new order under whose banner people of different colours--"roast coffee . . . banana and golden, [or] like the earth in a rice-field"--will be united. It is a far cry from the bitterness of some poems of *Chants d'ombre* and even of this second volume, and paves the way for the "Prière de Paix" at the end.

Hosties noires is pervaded with antithetic notions of hope and despair, victory and defeat and, eventually, transgression and pardon.

There is significantly less stress on the nobility of the black warriors (except in their godlike bodies) as they do the work of undistinguished privates. In "A L'Appel" there is a shade of optimism in the vision of a day of liberation for all colonized peoples of Africa. By extension, the victory will include France itself, soon to be under Germany's oppressive yoke in World War II, as her own subject peoples are now under hers. There is little of the nostalgia and dreamy peacefulness of *Chants d'ombre* here, for the action of the poem takes place beneath a sky overcast by clouds and the smoke of guns and destruction.

One of the early poems in *Hosties noires* "Aux Tirailleurs Sénégalais" exposes the grim plight of the Senegalese soldiers. In the midst of the war in which they have sacrificed their lives for peace, the black soldiers lie in obscurity having no one to identify them in their "triple encasement of night"--their black skins, their gazeless eyes and the dark night itself. These soldiers have moreover been denied the traditional burial and with the tears of their forgetful wives drying all too soon there is no guarantee that their departed souls will be given the sustenance they need to prevent them from becoming "perfectly dead." Only their brother soldiers have given them some recognition at their death. True, Senghor admits, "we have not hired mourners, not even the tears of your former wives" but, he continues, "we who used to spell out your names in the months you died [now] bring you the friendship of your comrades from the same age group" (*PO* 64).

In keeping with the sentiments of the preliminary poem, Senghor, as poet, wishes that he could some day sing the fervent friendship of his comrades "in a voice the colour of breeze":

You, *tirailleurs* of Senegal, black brothers, warm-handed under ice
and death,
Who but I should sing of you, your brother in arms, in blood?

I will not leave the speeches to ministers nor to generals
I will not leave you to be buried darkly with a little contemptuous
praise.
You are not poor with nothing in your pockets without honour
I will tear down the *banania* smiles from every wall in France. (*PO* 55).

Though they are now cold in death the Senegalese *tirailleurs* are remembered as warm-handed since, for Senghor, the image of warm hands suggests fraternity, the warmth of love and friendship, and life. These soldiers have not died in vain as a later poem, "Tyaroye," makes clear:

No, you have not died in vain O Dead! This blood is not tepid water.
It waters, thickly, our hope which will blossom in the twilight.
It is our thirst our hunger of distinction, these great absolute queens
No, you have not died in vain. (*PO* 90-91).

Accordingly, in many of the poems of *Hosties noires* Senghor attempts to perpetuate the memory of his fellow countrymen who gave up their lives in the struggle for peace, a peace that they all too often knew hardly anything about. As spokesman for the black dead, Senghor elects to put down arms and sing of men--a move for which he craves indulgence from his guiding ancestor, Sira-Badral:

Forgive me Sira Badral, forgive me Southern Star of my blood,
Forgive your great nephew if he has thrown away his spear, for the
sixteen notes of the *sorong.* ("Poem liminaire," *PO* 56, *PP* 122).

But the shadow of the politician hovers in the background as he charts his plan of campaign:

Our new nobility is not to dominate our people, but to be their rhythm
and their heart
Not to graze the lands but like the grain of millet to rot in the earth
Not to be the head of the people, but their mouth, their trumpet.
(*PO* 56, *PP* 122).

It is besides hardly a poet's bitterness that erupts in the pledge to tear down posters advertising a cocoa produce using the stereotyped, grinning negro, for as Mezu successfully demonstrates, the wide happy smile is characteristic of Senghor's *tirailleurs* in this collection.[4]

The theme of honour is a recurring *motif* throughout Senghor's second volume of poetry. Delineating the cultural history of the kingdom of Sine in Senegal which he offers as a paradigm of traditional African society, Senghor dwells continually on concepts of purity and high, even royal, parentage pre-eminently in relation to himself but sometimes generally in relation to the black race. In "Que m'accompagnent" of *Chants d'ombre*, for instance, he reminisces about the exchange of gifts between his father and King Koumba Ndofene Dyouf the "proud vassal" who "governed the administrator of Sine-Saloum." In this same poem in which he first chooses his "toiling black people . . . the peasant race throughout the world" Senghor recounts the story of the battle between the fiery Malinkes and the more sedate people of Elissa and its environs in which the defenders declare: "We are killed, Alimamy, but not dishonoured." Also the section of *Hosties noires* entitled "Camp 1940" (Camp 1940 was Senghor's own camp during the war) has as its first poem "Au Guélowar" in which can be found the following line: "The purest among us are dead: they could not swallow the bread of shame." (*PO* 72, *SP* 36). Like their ancestors who stood and fought against impossible odds and died rejoicing in the honour of their bravery, these dear descendants, fighting with dangerous courage, have lost their lives for France.

But there is something paradoxical in the latter-day struggle that is not apparent in the earlier encounter:

> We do not know if we shall breathe at the harvest for what just cause
> we will have fought.
> If it ever comes to using us . . .
> ("Prière des Tirailleurs Sénégalais," *PO* 70, *SP* 36).

The inherent paradox of brave men, men of honour and esteem giving up their lives for a cause they knew nothing about deepens the paradox. But the honour itself is a quaint honour, the nobility a curious nobility, given the declaration that the African race is of peasant stock. Furthermore, Senghor stresses time and again his status and that of all the other Senegalese soldiers referred to in the work—they are all privates in the French army. Where then does this nobility, this honour lie?

Their honour, Senghor affirms, rests in their bodies which are the vestal victims sacrificed for the peace of the world. A number of passages bear witness to this claim:

> And the plain submits until the sharp "no" of the free volunteers
> Who offered their godlike bodies, their athletic splendour, for the

catholic honour of man

. . . .

O Lord, heed the offering of our militant faith
Receive the offering of our bodies, the choice of all these darkly
perfect bodies
Black victims, lightning rods.
("Prière des Tirailleurs Sénégalais," *PO* 68, 70, *SP* 35, 36).

See Africa arises, the Black and the Brown her sister.
Africa made white steel, Africa made black sacrifice
That the hope of man may live. ("Au Gouverneur Eboué," *PO* 74, *PP* 130).

It is an interesting development in Senghor's ideology that although he rejoices in the contribution to peace made by the Senegalese as representatives of the black race, he does not pretend (other than symbolically) that theirs is the crucial or decisive contribution, for Europe, too, has its *blanches hosties*, its "white victims" ("A l'Appel"). What he does assert is his right to chant the nobility of his black companions who in their self-sacrifice for a cause they do not comprehend are repeating a cycle that has lasted for centuries.

Senghor does not seek to give a composite picture of the war, for he is concerned not with an objective account of the political issues involving Europe, but with the plight of the African who is given a lowly status. The Second World War is not the subject of the work. However, it is what gives rise to the casualties and the predicament of black soldiers from Africa. In attempting to demonstrate the contribution of the black man to human culture and progress, the poet selects an area where the Negroes can be seen at their best. It is an emphasis that Senghor is not unaware of, as a passage from his 1939 essay "Ce que l'homme noir apporte" proves.

Speaking of culture, he remarks:

> I wish to devote myself to its [i.e., black culture's] human blossoming or rather to its new branches grafted on the old human trunk. Slanted, no doubt. The short-comings of Blacks are sufficiently well known for me not to go over them.[5]

A cluster of poems under "Camp 1940" provides valuable insights into the alternating strains of Senghor's philosophy. The first of these, "Femmes de France," is the only poem in the volume which, while overshadowed by the war, is neither addressed to a propitiating God, nor concerned with sufferings by Senghor or any of the black warriors but devoted solely to blessing the women of France, the "petites bourgeoises et paysannes" whose sons and brothers are at the wars. (It is a continuing extension of Senghor's concept of a peasant stock to embrace those of all nations and colours, an idea introduced in "A l'Appel" and carried forward to "Prière des Tirailleurs Sénégalais," in which the soldiers offer their "darkly perfect bodies" along with the bodies of the French peasants.) The three poems following "Femmes de France" are "Taga de Mbayo Dyob," "Ndessé" and "Lettre à un prisonnier." These amplify the themes of honour, peasant nobility, nostalgia and isolation in Europe in contrast with communalism in Africa and pride of race.

In particular, "Ndessé" and "Lettre à un prisonnier" contain elements such as the following, that recall the tender character of the short lyrics of *Chants d'ombre*:

> Mother, I should have been the blossoming palm-tree of your old age, I
>   would like to give you back the drunkenness of your youthful years
> I am only your little child who aches, and he keeps turning around on
>   his painful sides
> I am only a child who weeps when he remembers your motherly breast.

Take me in the night that the assurance of your gaze lightens —
Tell me once more the old tales of night watches, that I may lose myself
along routes without memory. ("Ndessé," *PO* 82).

Make room for me about the stove, so that I may resume my place which
is still warm.
Let our hands touch while we are taking the smoking rice of friendship
Let the old Serer words pass from one mouth to the other like a pipe
of friendship
Let Dargui share with us his succulent fruits--hay perfumed with dryness!
Serve us with your jokes, huge like Africa's prodigious navel.
("Lettre à un prisonnier," *PO* 84).

The first of these excerpts echoes the sense of loss as well as the sense of being lost in a world without love. The double loss of contact with home and metropolitan France was expressed in *Chants d'ombre* through the contrast of warm loving hands and the close intimacy of Joalian life with the blue-eyed but hard handed distance of the Parisians. In these lines, the sense of loss combines with nostalgic images of birth and childhood to climax, in the second passage, in the image of Africa's prodigious navel as the navel of the world.[6] From the agony of estrangement from his mother and the torturing memories of her love and care in his childhood we move to the celebration of communal warmth and friendship in the prisoner-of-war camps. Once more Senghor feels himself a part of the group, is uninhibited and interacts with others in mutual affection.

Reliving the past, however, only emphasizes the reality and the misery of the present. Amid the praise-songs to his African brothers, his age group friends and those of his comrades who call him master, the insistent thunder of bombs exploding, of machine guns firing, goes on as people die in the acrid fever of battle and rotting bodies strew the plains.

With the holocaust and carnage in mind, Senghor characterizes the war as a supreme example of Europe's barbarism, the climax and finale of centuries-long depravity, savagery and hate. This view is expressed in his depiction of bankers, bombers and tanks: bankers and diplomats barter and betray black flesh, bombs and tanks destroy. The intense dislike and distrust of bankers has already been expressed in "Le Retour de l'Enfant prodigue," the closing poem of *Chants d'ombre*.

A sinister suggestion of double dealing permeates the atmosphere of *Hosties noires*. In "A l'Appel," as death stalks the fighting peasants in the trenches, "the pot-bellied bankers" entrench themselves in the suburbs away from "the miseries of the native locations." "Le Désespoir d'un volontaire libre" pictures the black volunteer

> . . . pacing his circle, pondering the latest blunder,
> The latest affront--sweat breaks on his forehead--to his sacrifices
> paid for in bad money.
> He did not even ask for the fifty centimes--not a centime
>
> But only his human dignity, to be posthumously awarded.
> They have given him the vestments of slavery, and he thought they were
> the white robes of martyrdom
> O naïve nature! (*PO* 66, *SP* 33).[7]

Senghor implies that none of the black soldiers gets any mark of distinction from the white military establishment. The black volunteers are all privates, humbled noblemen performing mercenary duties, unlike their ancestors who were "killed but not dishonoured." In "Ndessé," a poem to his mother, Senghor tells her "I am no longer the official who has authority, the marabout with spellbound disciples. . . . / Mother, I am a mortified soldier whom they nourish with coarse millet." The only thought that mitigates, perhaps, the impact of the merchants' vicious dealings with Africa appears in the form of a question in "Tyaroye": "Is it true that the bankers' hatred has bought her [i.e., France's] arms of steel?" Senghor asks, implying that Europe, too, is at the mercy of heartless merchants. We are, however, finally reminded in the concluding poem, "Prière de Paix," that "many . . . missionaries have blessed the weapons of violence and come to terms with the gold of the bankers." (*PO* 96, *PP* 137).

The devastation of bombs and tanks is a virtually new element in the poetry of *Hosties noires*. In the final poem of *Chants d'ombre* the empty courtyard of his parents' dwelling led Senghor to wonder whether or not it was "a district struck by four-engined eagles / And the strong pounce of leonine bombs." In *Hosties noires* evidence of the wreckage and carnage of these weapons of war is apparent everywhere.

The preliminary poem of *Hosties noires* establishes the fact that the bombs are destroying more than buildings and vegetation: they are bringing down a whole civilization.

> . . . why that bomb
> In the garden won so patiently from the thorns of the bush?
> Why that bomb on the house built up slowly stone by stone?
> (*PO* 56, *PP* 122).

The garden rescued from thorns and the house built up slowly are of course figurative representations for Western civilization, specifically French culture. Senghor is divided in his love for France, his posture as poet of Negritude and his role as a proponent of cultural pluralism. In a double vision he laments France's suffering and welcomes her humiliation as God's way of making the unequal races more equal. Consequently, in the midst of "the panic of black soldiers in the thunderstorm of tanks" ("A l'Appel") he can rejoice over their plunder as he has done over the bankruptcy in Senegalese shops:

> The purest among us are dead: they could not swallow the bread of shame.
> And now here we are caught in the snare, delivered to the barbarism of the civilized
> Exterminated like wild boars. Long live tanks! Long live aeroplanes!
> ("Au Guélowar," *PO* 72).

The mordant acrimony in the poet's exclamation is nowhere else more caustic. Europe, for centuries the scourge of Africa, now has her own weapons of mass destruction turned against her in a wave of self-destruction. Ironically, Africans who have suffered from pillage in their own lands, are even here caught up in the destruction--hence the remark that "Europe has flattened me like the soldier's blade under the pachydermic paws of tanks" ("Ndessé"). For its part the "barbarism of the civilized" should not escape notice, since it combines the hollowness of the bankers with the violence of war. The humble African peasant has no share in this barbarism for he knows nothing of the "substantial meals which do not nourish" and the sleep walking crowd of Europeans who, "deaf chameleons of change . . . have renounced their identity as men" ("Lettre à un prisonnier"). Indeed, the black private has exhibited the bravery of a first rate soldier:

"You have faced more than death, more than the tanks and the planes
that defy all magic
"You have faced hunger, you have faced cold and the humiliation of
captivity." ("Taga de Mbaye Dyôb," *PO* 80, *SP* 42).

He prefers to share the burden of combat with his peasant comrades, black and white, rather than break the tacit bond of loyalty.

In conjunction with the symbols of a garden free of thorns and a house painstakingly pieced together, Senghor introduces the monsters of war let loose by a barbaric culture. Since the four-engined eagle and the pachydermic creature suggest monsters from an age before civilization, the clock in Europe is turned back in the wake of a holocaust of torn metal and hideous howling which breaks the peace of Africa:

Down there the sudden storm, the firing of the white coasts of the
white peace of my Africa.
And in the night when there is thunder of rending metal
Hear, close to us, for two hundred miles, all the howlings of moonless
jackals and the catlike mewings of bullets
Hear the sharp roar of the guns and the trumpeting of hundred-ton
monsters. ("Chant de printemps," *PO* 86, *SP* 44).

The man-made monsters however lack the mobility of elephants as they exhibit "the barbaric clumsiness of monsters from the foretime of the world" ("Aux soldats négro-américains").

Although the chastisement of Europe is executed with her own weapons, the whip handle is not always held by white hands. Time and again, Senghor uses the metaphor of the victim, Africa, become the Mother whose sons are made "rods to chastise the pride of the nations" ("Chant de printemps"). Accordingly, there is in the poem a hint of quickly suppressed relish as Senghor asks whether the European cathedrals have been bombed by Negro soldiers from America:

I did not recognize you in your prison of sad-coloured uniforms
I did not recognize you under that calabash helmet with no plume
I did not recognize the quavering whinny of your iron horses that
drink but do not eat.
No longer the nobility of elephants but the barbaric clumsiness of
monsters from the foretime of the world.
. . . .
Brothers, I do not know if it was you who bombed the cathedrals, the
pride of Europe
If you are the lightning that in God's hand burnt Sodom and Gomorrah.
(*PO* 89, *SP* 47).

The ambivalent function that Senghor ascribes to the black soldiers from America and Africa reflects his own ambivalent disposition towards France and Europe. Europe is both enemy and friend (in that order) for while she has raped Africa and made her desolate over a long period of time she has also brought her gifts which are most worthy. In Senghor's case it is not only the language and its culture that Europe has supplied but also the light of Roman Catholicism which he has embraced. How then can he reject the European influence that has changed his life? And yet how can he defend African culture which has suffered such deprivation at the hands of Europe? Senghor strives to reconcile the two opposing commitments whose constant friction creates conflict within the poems.

By seeking to mate the apparently irreconcilable principles of Negritude and Albitude Senghor ventures on a number of paradoxes, as we have seen. Foremost among these is the concept of the inherent nobility of the African peasant whose thankless function in the war he justifies by asking "Who will do the lowest jobs if not those who were born noble?" ("Camp 1940"). Negroes, then, though a peasant race, have a noble lineage. Are they not direct descendants of Christ Himself? ("Neige sur Paris"). On this basis Senghor argues that the black soldiers are, in fact, the saviours of white civilization because they have in them the vitality to light a new dawn after the cataclysm of World War II; their closeness to nature, to the rhythm of the dancing world, is the one thing needful to build the new order. This salvation comes only through the sacrifice of "their godlike bodies," but the sacrificial role is coupled with another role--that of scourgers of Europe's pride. Their dual role (that of victim and chastening agent) makes them "black victims, lightning rods" ("Prière des Tirailleurs Sénégalais").

The ultimate paradox to resolve all existing paradoxes Senghor reserves for "Prière de Paix," the finale of the sombre fugue of *Hosties noires*. In its opening lines he calls the whole work a "ciborium of sufferings" offered to Christ on behalf of Africa crucified in His place. The plea is one for pardon of Europe's wrongs as a prelude to the clear dawning of the new day and the building of the new city, which will replace the African culture trampled by Europeans, and the European one itself destroyed by internecine warfare. All the same, the peace prayer proceeds by attack, laying bare the wrongs which must be pardoned. Senghor makes himself surrogate for Europe, confessing her sins and seeking absolution for her. The epigraph he chooses for the poem comes from the *Pater Noster*. He leaves out the first half of the line on forgiveness--*Et dimitte nobis debita nostra*--preferring the second half, *sicut et nos dimittimus nostra*, apparently because the martyred Negro race has done penance enough.

In any event the recitation of Europe's wrongs is necessary not only for her own purgation but also for Africa and specifically for the poet himself. It brings release from the hatred that had lurked below the surface even when he asked leave of the martyrs to pardon the oppressors earlier in the volume:

The immense song of your blood will conquer machines and mortars
The pulse of your speech, lies and sophistry
No hate your heart without hate, no guile your guileless heart
Black martyrs O undying race, give me leave to say the words which will
    pardon. ("Assassinats," *PO* 77, *SP* 41. Italics mine.)

Senghor himself, it turns out, has a confession to make. It is revealed in his declaration "And lo, the serpent of hatred raises its head in my heart, that serpent that I believed was dead" ("Prière de Paix"). Considering the inventory of wrongs that he draws up, it is little wonder that he prays for the death of the serpent before the sting of hatred can reach out to consume his heart.

"Prière de Paix" is a poem whose main strands have already been prefigured in "Neige sur Paris" of *Chants d'ombre*. Senghor's concern being pre-eminently cultural, only the crucial cultural events are recounted. The two-generation colonization of Senegal is mentioned (Senghor frequently uses Senegalese landscapes as a microcosm for Africa); likewise the deployment of Senegalese soldiers as mercenaries in other French territories. In a similar manner the liberation of Haiti is referred to. Senghor considers this liberation a cultural as well as a political victory for black solidarity and culture. But on the one hand the ravages of slavery, involving not only the exportation of millions of Africans but also the death of scores of millions more, and on the other the desecration of African religious images allied with the indignities done to African sages and priests, receive the fullest accounting. The poem is dated 1945 but the sentiments expressed evidently refer to the period during the war when France was under the occupying power of Germany and could feel a yoke of oppression similar to the one it had imposed on its dependencies. The pious hope is obvious. Senghor wishes that the threat to the free existence and expression of a national will and consciousness will be a lesson to France and the rest of Europe in dealing with colonies under their management and that the inhumanity of the encounter will give birth to a new and multi-cultural humanism.

It may be recalled that hints of duplicity and sophistry by white Europe are scattered through many of the poems of *Chants d'ombre* and *Hosties noires*. In the closing sections of "Prière de Paix" Senghor makes perhaps the most blatant attack on France's policy towards her dependencies and at the same time the most affirmative declaration of his affection for her to be found in all his poetry.

O Lord, take from my memory the France which is not France, mask of
    smallness and hatred upon the face of France
That mask of smallness and hatred for which I have hatred--yet I may
    well hate Evil
For I have a great weakness for France.
. . . .
O bless this people, Lord, who seek their own face under the mask and

can hardly recognize it
Who seek Thee amidst cold and hunger that gnaw their bones and entrails.
(*PO* 95-6, *PP* 136-7).

This prayer evinces the desire to be rid of barriers to communication and recalls the lone individual who at the outset had yearned to be in communion with people in a white world ("In Memoriam") but who as late as "Lettre à un prisonnier" was to express this regret:

I write to you from the solitude of my residence which is under watch.
The dear residence of my black skin.
Lucky friends, who have never known walls of ice and rooms so bright
they sterilize
Every seed on the masks of the ancestors and even the memories of love.
. . . .
I do not recognize them any more, white men, my brothers.
They were so far away this evening in the cinema, lost beyond the
emptiness they left around my skin. (*PO* 83, *PP* 132-3).

These lines lay bare the biting cold of estrangement and the pangs of a sensitive man hungry for the love of the possessors of a culture he is in the process of fusing with his own. The sensations gnaw at the very soul of Senghor's being and give a sharp edge to his lamentation.

Almost alone among poets of Negritude[8] Senghor thus early (1948) extends the right hand of fellowship to white France and through her to all Europe. In doing this he leaves himself open to the attack of being "trop français,"[9] a charge that had been levelled against him at least four years earlier in 1944 by Senegalese students in France. His accommodating posture is not simply a tribute to the depth of Christian forgiveness welling up in him[10] but more importantly to an acceptance of the influences that Western culture had had on his life and the deepening exigences of a political career in the years when independence still seemed a dim and distant goal for most colonies in Africa and the West

Indies.

In the light of Senghor's aesthetic, the most compelling image in his depiction of France is that of the mask. He writes of the "mask of smallness and hatred" and of "people . . . who seek their own face under the mask and can hardly recognize it" ("Prière de Paix"). Now Senghor attests in his essays to the importance of sculpture in African art,[11] an art in which music, dance, song, sculpture and painting supplement and reinforce one another. For example, he describes the task of the sculptor in the following manner:

> The essential function of the sculptors is to represent the dead Ancestors and the spirits with statues which may, at the same time, be symbol and dwelling. The object is to grasp, to feel their personal soul as effective will, in order to gain access to the *surreal*.
>
> By means of a human representation, specifically through the representation of the human face, the most faithful representation of the soul. It is a striking fact that masks predominate among the anthropomorphic statues.[12]

In another passage André Malraux is approvingly cited: "the African mask is not the fixation of a human expression, but an apparition . . . The sculptor does not unwittingly geometrize a phantom, he kindles it through its geometry; his mask functions less to the extent that it resembles man than to the extent that it does not."[13]

It becomes obvious that the mask on the face of France is far other than the sacred African mask which, though not an exact reproduction, is a representation of the human face that reveals the personal soul of the being, the ancestor, symbolized.[14] By contrast, the mask worn by France is so unlike the real face and soul behind it that it becomes a disguise instead of a revelation. And because she sees the false as the real, the true face becomes unrecognizable. For Senghor, the black man seeking his identity as a human being reaches out to a golden past, part myth and part fact; to a large extent that past is contemporaneous with the present because of the continued vitality of the mask and other religious and philosophic artifacts. Senghor seems to be saying that the white man's mask of hypocrisy and lies must be removed so that authentic black and authentic white may enter hand in hand the new world of raceless brotherhood.

A significant point to notice is that Senghor does not preach narrow conformity. In his later poetry he continues to point out fundamental differences between the black ethic and white culture. These divergences are in fact necessary, he argues, to prevent the uniformity that will result in the cultural subjugation of many peoples to a unitary world culture. His password, then, especially to Negro peoples is to assimilate rather than be assimilated.[15] If each culture retains its own salient features while substituting better ideas from other cultures for others which are inferior, the world will move steadily towards a rich, varied and brighter dawn of peace and brotherhood.

Chapter III

Ethiopiques: The Poet-Politician as "Cultural Half Caste"

Senghor laments the internal conflict of African and European values within him in the preliminary poem of *Hosties noires* (1948). While he feels obliged to defend the honour and nobility of his black brethren from Africa and the United States he is also conscious, in this poem, of a growing love for France in which he had lived continuously, except for brief visits to Senegal, for exactly twenty years. The cultural conflict is exacerbated rather than resolved by the political demands of the time. Senghor was, in 1948, a naturalized French citizen representing his native Senegal in the French Assembly. He was faced with complex and conflicting loyalties between the colonial interests of the metropolitan government in France and the aspirations of a colonized people whom he represented but hardly knew.[1] The poems in *Ethiopiques* were written during a period of intense political activity, the highlights of which were his re-election as députe to the French Assembly in 1951 and again in 1956, the triumph of his recently formed political party over that of his former colleague, Lamin Guèye, in the Senegalese elections of 1951, and his appointment to Edgar Faure's French cabinet in 1955. The conflicts that were apparent in his double allegiance to France and to Senegal are intensified by circumstances in his private life.

This assessment of the poems of *Ethiopiques* takes into account the personal, cultural and political conflicts that Senghor experiences. The "Epitres à la Princesse" will be examined first. These Epistles are verse letters to a beloved who counsels the poet against relinquishing his political career the continuation of which appears to be incompatible with their future union. The tone and manner of these poems are in sharp contrast with the approach in another group of poems called epics. The epics stridently assert Negritude as a formulation of values whose *raison d'être* seems to be that the movement is a deliberate antithesis of established European values which are rejected as a product of white racism. The poetry of Negritude is criticized by white critics to whom Senghor responds in his "Postface" to *Ethiopiques* and even more severely by other African writers who dismiss it for its abandonment of reality, its operation on an intellectual rather than on a utilitarian level, and its endorsement of a dangerous cultism.

The "Epitres à la Princesse" are poems of love written and published later than Senghor's original volume of love poems, *Chants pour Naëtt* (1949). The Songs will be discussed at length in the next chapter as an integral part of *Nocturnes* where they are newly titled "Chants pour Signare" but a few comments on their general features will help to emphasize the preoccupations of the poet in the Epistles.

The Epistles are, first of all, letters and not songs. The lyric temper of the Songs, combining passionate desire with endearing gentleness, often evokes a sense of mysterious charm and giddy abandon at once reminiscent of Eden and *amour courtois*. On the other hand, the lovers in the Epistles, while preserving the conventions of secrecy and distance in accordance with the courtly love convention, and in spite of an all too spirited passion which the questing pilgrim must keep at bay, cannot shake themselves free of the restraining hand of events and influences in the real world. The Songs fuse time and space, past and present, reality and fantasy in a surrealistic blend of images such as the immobile African mask and the mobile human face, the human and divine, sense and spirit, hunting and personal longing in a dream-like landscape. By contrast, the Epistles put past, present and future in perspective, whether time concerns the history of the poet's race, the course of human history or the future of their relationship, the last of which, private and secret as it is, is dependent on the outcome of more public issues.

In the Epistles Senghor virtually dispenses with the intensely passionate style of the Songs, preferring the assertive tone. The confidence he declares in his people is also apparent in his attitude to the Princess, his shameful weakness for her notwithstanding. He is not an obscure suitor of doubtful origin but a secure statesman, "Ambassador of the black people," the Itinerant who moves back and forth between the metropolis and the motherland. His correspondence with the Princess is carried to and fro by couriers while his impatience is revealed in his despatch of several cavaliers with a virtual ultimatum to her, for his "mission is not with a moon."

Senghor recognizes divisions of time and space within the compass of the Epistles. There is consequently some impatience on his part, as soliciting lover, to secure the acquiescence of the beloved, the Princess of Belborg. This is not to say that the theme of the Epistles is *carpe diem* for the Biblical echo in "Leave father leave mother. The dead go with the dead" (*PO* 143, *PP* 159) as well as the confident statement "your only rival, the passion of my people" (*PO* 140) strongly suggest that the liaison sought is to be permanent. The pressure towards precipitate action stems from conflicting demands of public and private life: the mission as Ambassador of the black people and the elections to high office on the one hand and, on the other, love for his Princess of Belborg. The circumstances of public and private life no longer allow an easy escape into a Childhood Kingdom but rather impose a choice of alternatives. Will he choose, once again, his toiling black people or will he elect to follow his love for his *Signare* and risk his chances of winning political elevation in a black country?

The Princess will have him choose duty above his love for her. She sees through all the excuses he makes and keeps him from compromising himself politically. Since the fourth epistle is concerned with the conflict, it resembles many of the poems in Senghor's work which turn on the themes of regret, longing and divided loyalties.

The poem opens on a nostalgic note, the memory of idyllic summer nights and of the lake "which is scarcely ruffled by the games of fishes ideograms of silence." Regret is never far from Senghor in such a setting:

I miss the days gone by--you raised the bridge on every evasion
And your rages which broke the precious vases, the fibres of my heart
Delights or dolours I cannot tell. (*PO* 140).

Pastoral settings have a way of confounding the senses of this poet, of depriving him of the ability to distinguish between opposites. The poet who can confuse present and past, night and day, is subject to the pain of pleasure and the pleasure of pain. Characteristically, the statement of loss is followed by an expression of longing:

Ah! to live through Summer without day and without night, but a long
    day with neither break nor pause
On the buds of lips the melody of hips the fever of hills
And in your heart Princess of Belborg.
And in my heart your smile was watching like a lamp. (*PO* 140).

But the idyllic splendour of a summer without night or day does not last. Less pleasant responsibilities claim attention: epidemics, epizooties, a meagre harvest, clan and caste disputes. Moreover, the girls of Sine who chanted his nobility now sing of his transformation under the influence of the Princess:

You saw through all my cunning, you kept me from my intent, and the
    girls of Sine
Were mocking my weakness in song under your golden voice under your
    eyes
And my face became ashen in disgrace. (*PO* 140-41).

It is not clear whether the sense of shame results from an awareness of duties left unfulfilled or from the temptation to abandon affairs of state for personal self-fulfilment, or still yet from a sense of guilt at having abandoned the girls of Sine for the Northern princess.

Nevertheless, a commitment to honour wins at the end, a commitment to the self-appointed task of spokesman and of leader of the black people. No sooner is he back among his people however than he begins to long once more for "the prison" of her charm. In his poetry Senghor never seems to be comfortable in the present; it is always the past, always the thing missed or lost, even if this is the real prison of a war camp ("Libération"), that fascinates him.

The third Epistle is perhaps the only one of the five which closely resembles the lyric strain of the love songs of *Nocturnes*. Senghor has just received the Princess's letter and thanks her for its "words and substance," declaring that he wishes to learn more about her country and about her. In his mind's eye her land of snow and his land of salt sing in unison but the Princess, in her circumspection, has conjured up to him a wintry picture--presumably of his political desolation if he should yield to his amorous instincts--and has then defended him from its blighting effect:

> the winter you conjure before me, shielding me from it like
> a precious fur
> Telling me both the sign and the sense of it, the snow that flames with
> a thousand fires
> Burning away the body's weight, making the spirit sharp, the heart
> candid. (*PO* 137-8, *SP* 80).

The episode depicts Senghor in a mood of loneliness, a mood common in his early poetry. Here, however, it is neither the younger man of "Nuit de Sine" about to descend into the "high profundities of sleep," nor the jazz orphan of "Joal" whose loneliness makes him weep as he tramps "wearily down the days of Europe." Instead it is the Othello whose Desdemona pities his race for the dangers it has passed:

> Thanks to the Princess who finds time for my stories, weeping over the misfortunes of my race.
> The wars against the Almamy. The downfall of Elissa, and the exile to Dyilor in Salum
> The founding of Sine. The disaster
> When the Guelowars went down like heavy sheaves before the guns. The horsemen, unsaddled
> Fell upright their eyes wide open to the *griot's* song.
> And again the downfall of Dyilor, cactus and *khakhams* investing the manor-house. (*PO* 138, *SP* 80-1).

The recapitulation of the saga of his race is not now a complaint. It is evidence of the psychological dislocation which the macrocosmic black race--and Sine-Salum as epitome of that race--has suffered;[2] and it immediately brings out the personal crisis of identity that Senghor himself has experienced:

> And that other exile that my heart bears more hardly, the tearing of self from self
> From the tongue of my mother, from the skull of my Ancestor, from the drum of my soul. . . .

Senghor accords to his Princess the credit for announcing the revival of Dyilor. At this point, she seems to have become an agent of his apocalyptic dawn, announcing the good news and effecting the reconciliation between the black and white races. At the end of this third Epistle the poet portrays her in a way that at first reminds one of the portraiture of "Femme noire." On a closer view, however, the cosmic qualities of the black woman are either absent or muted for the Princess is an individualized lady like the lady of the Songs. The poet loves her both for herself and for her ability to remove the masks from the faces of his white brothers, but her features, while they move him to passion, bear no resemblance to the African mask or to the mask-like face of Naëtt carved in the likeness of the model that predates time:

For me you open the faces of my brothers the whitemen
For your face is a master-work, your body is a landscape.
Your eyes of green gold changing like the sea under the sun
Your ears of goldsmith's work, your wrist of crystal
Your nose of the sea-eagle, your sides of the strong woman who is
    mystery
You move with the movement of a ship -- O the wind in the foresail --
But keep me Princess from the tempest of your nostrils
Snorting like seals; and I stumble on the rocks.
(*PO* 139, *SP* 81).

His reliance on the Princess is both real and symbolic, for, as is often the case in his poetry, Senghor himself represents Africa. In this instance the Princess stands for Europe. Thus even while courting his loved one his words reflect his thinking on a grander scale. During this phase of his development the ideas of the Roman Catholic priest Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (especially those touching reconciliation and synthesis)[3] form part of his philosophic principles; consequently, in the last of the Epistles he returns to rhythm and dance as basic elements of the black aesthetic. The self is the obverse of the Other but they are mutually dependent. As male Sky and female Earth, therefore, the Prince and the Princess, Africa and Europe, will celebrate the mating of harmonious forces in the universe. Their union, however, is still uncertain. The final lines of the third Epistle read

I shall dance before you the dance of the storm.

Impatience drives into me his spurs of steel.
I must cool, ah! this coltish blood of mine.

And after the five Epistles Senghor adds a poem entitled "La Mort de la Princesse."

Even though this poem purports to focus on the Princess's death more than a third of the poem is taken up with her message to her "black Prince." This message is a response to the prosaic fifth Epistle in which Senghor has counselled her to leave father and mother, the dead with the dead. In her message she tells him that she is just as preoccupied with her obligations in her land of snow as he is with his in his land of salt. Her death in the poem is a symbolic death, like that of the grain in winter which is reborn in the spring. The voice of the poet who consecrates the passing of the Princess is the voice of the poet who confounds present and past, life and death.

The Princess as a person threatens the politician's future but in her symbolic posture as Europe she is his indispensable correlative. The following questions seem to be addressed to the two personalities in one:

- Princess my Princess, for of what use without you my orphan lands
My lands without seeds my herds without sheds my orchards without
    fountains?
Of what use my bush and my mud, my Negritude my night without sun? (*PO* 146).

The compromising spirit in these lines is a confirmation of Senghor's assertion, in the Postface to *Ethiopiques*, that he is a cultural half-caste who depends as much on the "sun" of Europe as on the "night" of Africa.[4] But the compromise is hardly achieved in *Ethiopiques* the epic poems of which preach more vociferously than ever before, the superiority of the black man over his European counterpart. The dialectical process of a reversal of values exhibited in these epics clashes with the thesis of humanism initiated in the Epistles and renewed in the Elegies of

Nocturnes. A consideration of the climactic development of this process which is reached in the epic poems of *Ethiopiques* will be followed by a review of some European and African criticism of the movement of Negritude.

The poem "L'Absente" may at first suggest by its title a celebration of the past, since Senghor's Orphic poetry is so typically backward looking. But in reality the poem reveals a shift in posture to meet the political responsibilities which constantly demand action in the present and preparation for the future. In its opening section Senghor appears to cast off the titles he has chosen for himself:

> Young girls with green bosoms, do not sing your Champion anymore nor
> the Slender One
> But I am not your honour, not the bold Lion, the green Lion that roars
> the honour of Senegal.
> My head is not golden, decked with great designs
> See my arms without heavy bracelets, my hands so bare!
> I am not the Leader, I never laid out trail nor dogma like the Founder
> The city with four gates, never uttered word to be etched on stone.
> I affirm; I am the Dyali. (*PO* 110).

The reason for this show of humility is that the electoral campaign of 1951 inspired the writing of "L'Absente" as Armand Guibert points out in his commentary on the poem.^{5} The young girls are singing Senghor's praise names and he withdraws from all of these (including identification with his political symbol the green Lion), to describe himself as the Dyali or troubadour. By so doing he is asserting his identification with the tradition of the people, according to which a poet is both poet and musician, athlete and dancer, sculptor and painter. But more than this, he is declaring that he stands a lowly suppliant in quest of a mandate which it is in the people's power to give or withhold. In order to win the elections, the tracing of a noble lineage and a royal past is not nearly enough: the politician has to show himself at one with his people.

The absent one, then, stands for success at the polls. She is the good news, the Queen of Sheba announced by the flamboyants. Guibert rightly stresses her multivalence when he writes:

> This Absent One . . . is embued with a four-fold symbolism. It is in fact possible to see in her political victory in prospect and in the distance; Woman as beloved, described in physical terms with her joys and her charms; Negritude proclaimed as a mystical force; and lastly Poetry, the supreme form of culture.[6]

In varying degrees these four levels of concern are apparent throughout *Ethiopiques* generally and somewhat more pointedly in the epic poems--"Congo," "New York" and "Chaka"--and in the Epistles.

Many images of coitus and reproduction conveyed through the invocation of African woman as symbol of the river of fertility occur in "Congo." The river itself is the "queen over Africa." Senghor declares

> By my head by my tongue you are woman, you are woman by my belly
> Mother of all things in whose nostrils is breath, mother of crocodiles
>   and hippopotami
> Manatees and iguanas, fishes and birds, mother of floods that suckle the
>   harvests. (*PO* 101 *SP* 65).

The poet bespeaks whatever he wishes her to be for it is his gift as Dyali to evoke the essence and the substance of things by naming their outward parts. As a woman and mother, therefore, the river gives life and breath to all creatures--birds and fish and animals--and all plants. The woman is also a beloved, taking on the sensuous qualities of the black woman of *Chants d'ombre*. "Congo" thus takes us back to the characteristic contours of an African landscape which evokes the black woman and beyond her mask the black goddess:

Calm Goddess with your smile that rides the dizzy surges of your blood
Malarious by your descent, deliver me from the surrection of my blood.
Drum drum you drum, from the panther's spring, the ant's strategy
From the viscous hates risen on the third day from the mud of the marshes
Ah! above all, from the spongy soil and the soapy songs of the Whiteman.
But deliver me from the night without joy and keep watch over the silence
    of the forests.
My lover at my side, whose oil makes docile my hands my heart
My strength is set up in abandon, my honour in submission
And my wisdom in the instinct of your rhythm. (*PO* 102-3, *SP* 65-6).

These lines are reminiscent of the images in "Femme noire" and "Masque nègre" of *Chants d'ombre* and are also suggestive of some of the poems in "Chants pour Naëtt." But there is a difference. The virile imagery of "Congo" is different. The element of fecundity has been accentuated by reference to the "dizzy surges" of the phallus and the fertile properties in mud from which the subhuman creatures and the black man originated on the third day of the creation. The distinction between this fecundity of blackness and the sterility of whiteness makes itself felt in the phrase "the spongy soil and the soapy songs of the Whiteman." The emphasis on the qualities of the black woman, however, is placed less on her divinity and immortality than on her supple, physical richness. In fact, one almost forgets that the poet is transforming the River Congo into a fertile woman until one is reminded at the end of the poem that

    the canoe is to be born again among the lilies of foam
To float above the sweetness of bamboos in the transparent morning of
    the world. (*PO* 103, *SP* 66).

The virile force permeating nature is symbolized in the triumph of the man over the beast in "L'Homme et la Bête." The triumph is more a feat of strength than skill and celebrates the elemental forces in man that make him vanquisher over all of nature's works. Such prowess, to be found in abundance in original man, has been relegated, in Senghor's view, to the black man who has maintained his tryst with the forces of nature instead of abandoning them for so-called progress as the white man has done. Thus "A New York" depicts the last stage of sterility and provides an alternative.

Senghor's reaction to New York is different from his response to Paris where he had earlier known isolation but to which he has become too much attached culturally to permit an easy severance. As a member of a delegation to the United Nations from Senegal he was struck rather differently by that other cultural capital, New York, as the opening lines of the first section of the poem make plain:

> New York! At first your beauty confused me, and your great long-legged
> golden girls.
> I was so timid at first under your blue metallic eyes, your frosty smile
> So timid. And the disquiet in the depth of your skyscraper streets
> Lifting up owl eyes in the sun's eclipse. (*PO* 115, *PP* 155).

The poet is little different from the many other visitors to New York City who view the city at first with the eyes of tourists and gaze at its compelling majesty in wonder. Senghor's anthropomorphism leads him to invest the buildings of New York with human characteristics which contrast with the noble countenance of African masks. He cowers before the frosty metallic smile of their imposing structures which eclipse the sun. Already, in his discomfiture, he has remarked how the artificial structures shut out the life-giving qualities of the natural sun and prepare the way for inevitable sterility. In place of the sun there is the city's "sulphurous light" at once unnaturally brilliant and corrosive. The original enchantment is short-lived, the disenchantment, when it comes, complete: "At the end of the third week the fever takes you with the pounce of a jaguar." The feeling of intense longing, of regret, felt in Paris is not present in New York; in its place there is a distaste that borders on revulsion:

A fortnight with no well or pasture, all the birds of the air
Fall suddenly dead below the high ashes of the terraces.
No child's laughter blossoms, his hand in my fresh hand
No mother's breast. Legs in nylon. Legs and breasts with no sweat and
    no smell.
No tender word for mouths are lipless. Hard cash buys artificial hearts.
No book where wisdom is read . The painter's palette flowers with crystals
    of coral. (*PO* 115-6, *PP* 155-6).

This is what man has made of nature as well as what man has made of man. It is a movement all the way up from the fecund mud of the marshes to the thin and unwholesome air about the pinnacles of the skyscrapers and the gradual sterilization occasioned by such a process. From the New York of Senghor's vision all *human* qualities are excluded, not just natural landscapes and springs. His mother had once declared that "it is not human not to shed tears"[7] and to this observation he seems to add his own, that it is also unnatural not to perspire and give off bodily odours. Senghor does not see people, only "legs in nylon," "legs and breasts." Everything is bloodless, clinical, artificial and sterile as the thing of beauty turns nightmare:

Insomniac nights O nights of Manhattan, tormented by fatuous fires,
    while the klaxons cry through the empty hours
And dark waters bear away hygienic loves, like the bodies of children on
    a river in flood. (*PO* 116, *PP* 156).

The cleansing property of water is ineffectual against hygienic loves sterilized into infertility.

Against this still-life of cold and orderly desolation occasioned by man's growing up and out from his original environment, Senghor posits the kaleidescopic bustle of life in Harlem, a Harlem of music and rhythm "humming with sounds and solemn colour and flamboyant smells." As the burning, sterile light of mid-Manhattan is replaced by the germinating life of evening, Senghor proclaims that "there is more truth in the Night than in the day." Here in the black ghetto, the pedestrians become Dan dancers, ploughing the pavement with bare feet; white rum and black milk gush forth; cotton flowers, and the wings of seraphim and wizard's plumes fill the air while the voices of people resonate with the rhythm of blood and drum to the male voice of Harlem whose very name the poet eagerly repeats:

> Harlem Harlem! I have seen Harlem Harlem! A breeze green with corn
> springing from the pavements ploughed by the bare feet of Dan[8]
> dancers
> Crests and waves of silk and breasts of spearheads, ballets of lilies
> and fabulous masks
> The mangoes of love roll from the low houses under the police horses'
> hooves.
> I have seen down the sidewalks streams of white rum and streams of black
> milk in the blue haze of cigars.
> I have seen the sky at evening snowing cotton flowers and wings of
> seraphim and wizard's plumes.
> Listen, New York, listen to your brazen male voice your vibrant oboe
> voice, the muted anguish of your tears falling in great clots of
> blood
> Listen to the far beating of your nocturnal heart, rhythm and blood of
> the drum, drum and blood and drum. (*PO* 116-7, *PP* 156-7).

Here, at long last, the sobbing jazz orphan ("Joal") finds joy and warmth in the throbbing world of Harlem.

Senghorian Negritude, as has been observed, reaches its apogee in the epic poems of *Ethiopiques*. In *Chants d'ombre* the opposition between black and white values is first declared in poems such as "Neige sur Paris" and especially "Prière aux masques." In the latter poem the Messianism of Negritude is made evident in the appeal to the masks to make the black man the leaven of European man. In the world of the epic poem of *Ethiopiques* the black man is not simply an agent leavening the white flour to make it rise to greater heights; he is the very sap of life. In "L'Absente" the nubile praise singers are asked to sing the desired victory ("L'Absente") which will soon become reality as "the Present One [la Présente] who nourishes the Poet with the black milk of love." (*PO* 114). And in "A New York" the fact that Senghor himself sees "streams of black milk in the blue haze of cigars," suggests that he has relinquished what Sartre calls solar hierarchy, only to replace it with a racial one.[9] Since, therefore, milk is symbolic of life-giving qualities, it must be identified with blackness both in colour and in essence; hence the black milk of love and the streams of black milk. With these values reversed, the black mystique can now venture on its cleansing and rejuvenating mission, for according to Senghor, it draws its life-force, its very ancestry, from the Supreme God Himself:

New York! I say to New York, let the black blood flow into your blood
Cleansing the rust from your steel articulations, like an oil of life
Giving your bridges the curve of the hills, the liana's suppleness.
See, the ancient times come again, unity is rediscovered the reconciliation of the Lion the Bull and the Tree
The idea is linked to the act the ear to the heart the sign to the sense.
See your rivers murmuring with musky caymans, manatees with eyes of mirage. There is no need to invent the Mermaids.
It is enough to open your eyes to the April rainbow

And the ears, above all the ears to God who with a burst of saxophone
laughter created the heavens and the earth in six days.
And on the seventh day, he slept his great negro sleep. (*PO* 117, *PP* 157).

The implication of Senghor's deepened commitment to the philosophy of Negritude is that such an avowal is a valuable instrument at the current stage of his political aspirations. If one remembers that his poetic and political vocations are contemporaneous, this development becomes readily understandable.[10] In the years from 1939 to 1945 during which Senghor wrote most of the poems that he finally published in his first volume of poetry, he also published his first political essay "Ce que l'homme noir apporte" (1939) followed by "Vues sur l'Afrique noire ou assimiler non être assimiler" (1945). Although he never advocates a theory of the black man's superiority in his political essays, by the time the epic poetry of *Ethiopiques* came to be written, the complementary role of the black man *vis-à-vis* European and world culture had been reversed in the wake of the struggle for independence by black peoples in Africa and the Caribbean. The dramatic poem, "Chaka," drawing inspiration from a historical leader of the Zulus of South Africa, portrays a similar struggle with the white man in pre-colonial days and returns to the theme of sacrifice which was the sounding note of *Hosties noires*. In this poem, however, the votive victim is not the black race but the black fiancée of the leader.

"Chaka" is divided into two chants. The first chant is an exchange of hostilities between a White Voice and Chaka and the second is a reflection by Chaka interspersed with praise chants by the Chorus. The accusatory White Voice is successively gloating, triumphant, derisive and condemnatory and the bulk of the charges it makes is to be found in the following speech:

WHITE VOICE
So you admit it Chaka! Will you admit to the millions of men you had killed
Whole regiments of pregnant women and children still at the breast?
You, provider-in-chief for vultures and hyenas, poet of the Valley of Death.
We looked to find a warrior. All we found was a butcher.
The ravines are torrents of blood. The fountain runs blood
Wild dogs behowl death in the plains where the eagle of Death hovers
O Chaka Zulu, worse than plague than the rolling fire of the bush.
(*PO* 119-20, *PP* 143).

This is not a pretty picture. But, then, the historic Chaka had been a bloodthirsty tyrant overrunning smaller tribes and enforcing iron discipline on his troops. That he had succeeded in organizing closely knit clans under his common leadership about the eighteen twenties Thomas Mofolo, the ultimate literary source of the legend, affirms in his *Chaka* written originally in Sesuto and translated into English in 1931. The knotty question is whether or not this end justifies the brutal and often inhumane means by which it was achieved. Although Senghor does not state it, the White Voice ironically stands accused of its own subjection of the indigenous people of the land in the inescapable casualties that war and oppression always entail; for where human beings are slaughtered wholesale, the question of bravery or cowardly butchery is in the final analysis academic.

Like many a conqueror before and since, the Chaka of Senghor has his own justification for the pursuit of power. He claims that he had a vision of all the people of the south in chains, working in shipyards, ports, mines and mills "[a]nd at evening segregated in the kraals of misery." He rhetorically affirms that he cannot stay deaf to his imagined cries of "a forest of woolen heads" nor be blind to the indignities of miners who "heap up mountains of black gold and red gold--and die of hunger" with "[a]rms drooping bellies hollow, immense eyes and lips calling to an impossible god." His role of saviour is adopted to prevent that vision from being realized. If he oppresses many of his people now it is in order to weed out dissidents in preparation for the onslaught. According to him love of his people not hatred of the white man ("I wanted all men to be brothers") leads him to raise the south against the "Pink Ears," a move that leads to his own personal suffering. As he reveals, it was not only his warriors who were sacrificed in the Valley of Death but also, in accordance with the wishes of the wizard, Isanussi, the person he loved most, there being "no power gained without sacrifice. Absolute power demands the blood of the dearest of all." (*PO* 123, *PP* 146). This dearest is Noliwe, Chaka's fiancée. The Chaka of Senghor (in contrast with the Chaka Mofolo describes) dearly loves his "Negro girl" whose beauty recalls the archetypal black woman but with more vivid details. Among other things, she is "fair with palm-oil, slender as a plume," her thighs are those "of a startled otter" and her breasts "mellow rice fields." In a passionate outburst he declares that he killed her *because* he loved her and beyond her "[f]or the love of my black-skinned people."

Ironically, Chaka's sacrifice has been in vain. Senghor celebrates the death of Chaka's passion rather than as Mofolo does the raging storm of it, as Chaka lies, a Messiah about to die, between two thieves, nailed to the ground with three assegais and bathed in his own blood. He has sacrificed all to no purpose--the vision is coming true. This situation of loss and regret accords well with Senghor's temperament and the tender lyricism characteristic of *Chants d'ombre* issues forth once more. It is the Poet of the Childhood Kingdom who sings.

But the song of the poet rings in one's ears like the opening movement of a swan song. The shepherd singing to his love is abdicating his pure pastoral world for the traditionally opposed life in the corrupt city and he breaks his reed. Senghor, faced with the choice between a poetic and a political career seems to be planning for himself the opposite of the recommendation of Chaka's Chorus when they declare "Let the politician die and the Poet live." Earlier, in one of his counterblasts to the White Voice, Chaka found some ground for agreement as he recalled the first landing of white men in South Africa:

I became a mind an untrembling arm, neither a warrior nor a butcher
As you said, a politician--the poet I killed--a man of action alone
A man alone, dead already before the others. . . (*PO* 122, *PP* 145).

Chaka lives a politician and a warrior, but dies a poet who avers, nonetheless,

But I am not the poem, but I am not the drum
I am the rhythm. It holds me still, it carves all my body like a statue
of the Baulé.
. . . .
No I do not make the poem, I am the one who accompanies it. (*PO* 128, *PP* 150).[11]

The remote parallel between the life of Chaka as Senghor portrays it and the poet's own perspectives on the life of the poet and the life of the politician is quite interesting. An exact parallel cannot of course be drawn. Senghor's divorce from his first wife, Ginette Eboué, is not a sacrifice for political ends whatever the circumstances leading to the marriage may have been. Thus when Chaka laments the death of his Noliwe sighing

Oh my Night, my Black One, my Noliwe!
That great weakness ~~is~~ dead under your hands of oil
The weakness that follows pain (*PO* 131, *PP* 153).

no necessary connection can be established with the Näett of the Songs, a similar cry having been uttered some ten or fifteen years before in "Que m'accompagnent":

O my Lioness my dark Beauty, my black Night my Black One my Naked One!
(*PO* 37, *PP* 116).

But the parallel between Senghor's life and that of Chaka as he portrays it is apt to provoke scrutiny of Senghor's own values and of his thinking. In addition, Senghor's attempt to glorify the past, sometimes by distortion and sometimes by an inversion of values as well as his self-identification within that past, has made both his poetry and the movement of Negritude targets for criticism by African and European writers.

Nigerian writer Wole Soyinka and South African writer David Rubadiri have taken issue with Senghor's assertion of black values in poems of *Ethiopiques*. Rubadiri first acknowledges that Senghor is "a good poet in many ways" but that his formula "emotion is Negro" tends to cramp the creative spirit to such an extent that "a work of art becomes meaningless." Rubadiri observes that Senghor portrays Harlem as a pastoral world of innocence (in contrast with Manhattan) when everyone "knows that it has its slums, its violence, its prostitution." The following passage from Rubadiri's "Why *African* Literature?" is significant:

> We are asked to believe that Manhattan women are just "scented crocodiles." And Harlem, which we know to be a den of misery, debauchery, poverty and oppression; stinking of overcrowded flats, filled with sprawling hungry children, we are asked to accept as "a green breeze of corn." Even when one knows that the spirit of Jazz throbs in Harlem this is negritude gone mad.[12]

But Senghor is no more mad when he romanticises Harlem in the poem, "A New York," than when he inverts the colour of milk in "the black milk of love" of "L'Absente" and again when he speaks of "the streams of black milk" in "A New York." The crux of the matter is not the inversion of reality but whether or not the new concepts are an integrated and meaningful pattern of ideas within the poem's universe of discourse.

Soyinka has made an even more serious charge against Senghor in an article "And After the Narcissist?"[13] by developing a thesis about Senghor's dissociated sensibility as evidenced in "Chaka." The criticism centres on the statement by Chaka that he is not a poet but a man of action alone. Soyinka asserts that the mistake Senghor makes is to imagine that poetry and politics are incompatible when they should properly be integrated. This basic argument informs much of Soyinka's wide-ranging critique. For Soyinka, Senghor projects a "poet's totem" which he erroneously proffers as the "totem's poet," in this case the poet or Dyali of African tradition. In place of the real African tradition Senghor has created a quasi-religious kingdom. He invokes rather than evokes this kingdom and pretends that there is action within it but in fact he separates action from sensibility. According to Soyinka's thesis although Senghor's poetry is vigorous and celebrative, without the intermesh of different levels of experience, it remains essentially static. "Chaka," he argues, is the product of narcissism which results when the writer fails to distinguish between "self-exploration and self manipulation." As an "intellectual fabrication," it reveals Senghor's ambivalent intellectualism: on one level the narcissistic impulse which stems from intellectual concepts of the African and on another, a "new intellectualized individualism" in "Chaka."

Soyinka suggests that the contradiction Senghor creates between the artist and the politician is resolved in the essence of Ogun, the Yoruba god of war and creativity. This essence has been adopted by Soyinka as the basis of his own creative philosophy. Viewed from Soyinka's perspective, Senghor becomes a poet who has "imposed on his Chaka a poetic stratification that is not compatible with the creative stress of a poet in Ogun possession."[14] South African fiction writer Alex La Guma, Guinean novelist Camara Laye, Nigerian poet Christopher Okigbo and Nigerian novelist Chinua Achebe in *Things Fall Apart* have all achieved this state of fusion and possession. Senghor's division of poet and politician, however, has undesirable results:

> [Such a] division. . .is the kind of exaggeration that breeds poetry of private decadence and falsifies creative values for the writer. The problem amounts very simply to the presence of the fundamental,

> active emotions and the poet's capacity to integrate these within the two main life experiences, love and death. Tenderness, fatalism, glory, courage, defiance, and fear are aspects of these two major experiences which the poet distorts within the imposition of his own self-expressiveness. Death is not secondary or vicarious. The politician is at his most sensitive when he responds to the physical interference of his own environment, and this is antithetical to the apostate contemplation of the navel, which is evasion.[15]

In criticising Senghor for creating a dichotomy between poet and politician Soyinka completely identifies the creature, Chaka, with its creator, Senghor. Thus, he declares, "Chaka's intensification of the body's endurance has become a vehicle for Senghor's self-worship, the entire concept of poetic identification is an elaborate occasion for his own physical idealization, his self-saturation in the historical (and other externalized) richness of his Negro-poetic heritage."[16]

The situation of poet and protagonist is however not completely identical in "Chaka." The historical Chaka was unscrupulous with his soldiers but, although Senghor's Chaka justifies the slaughter of his own men, there is no evidence that Senghor shares his callous justification that these men were dead wood burnt to ashes for the planting season and in preparation for the harvest; or that they were "smitten for 'the good to come'" like the ants in Soyinka's *A Dance of the Forests*. The poetry is indeed celebrative, especially in Chant II from which the questioning White Voice (which helps give Chant I something of the quality of medieval drama) is excluded; but the voices of the white man and the wizard are in effect externalizations of thoughts going through Chaka's mind. These thoughts may be partly compromised by some of the sentimental statements of the hero, but there is some movement signalled by the fact that Senghor's Chaka dearly loves his fiancée, Noliwe and that the supreme sacrifice of her life for political ends is challenged by the white adversary's mocking taunts. The attestation of Chaka's love is Senghor's creation. It was perhaps suggested by a love in his life which seemed incompatible with his career as a politician, but which, unlike Chaka's predicament, ended in synthesis and not in sacrifice.

There is, however, no disputing Soyinka's charge against Senghor's idealization of history and his role in it, whether as the "grandfather of my grandfather" ("Que m'accompagnent"), the Kaya-Magan, "king of the moon [uniting] night and day" ("Le Kaya-Magan") or as the "Ambassador of the black people" ("Epitres à la Princesse"); nor can one deny his idolization of his physical beauty as a black man in lines such as these: "I am standing up, strangely lucid / And I am handsome as the hundred yards runner, as the black Mauritanian stallion in rut" ("Elégie de minuit"). All the poems under consideration (except the elegies of *Nocturnes*) were written in the years before independence, specifically between 1936 and 1956 when the desire to reassert the black man's cultural values was still strongly felt--preponderantly by Francophone West Indians and Africans. Negritude was, of course, a vehicle for this reassertion. Senghor, rightly or wrongly, saw himself as a spokesman for the African cause and often characterizes himself as Africa in his poems, but it is also fair to point out that in his poetry generally and in *Hosties noires* in particular, every black man not just the poet reveals something of the god in himself.

Soyinka, as we shall discover in Chapter X, despises the propensity to self-deification which Senghor and other poets of Negritude exhibit.

In his many speeches and articles, Senghor has defended poets of Negritude, himself included, against charges by African critics like Rubadiri and Soyinka as well as by European critics like Henri Hell. The "Postface" to *Ethiopiques* is an example of such a defence. The main argument seems to be that the style, motivations and purpose of the poets of Negritude are misunderstood. Except for sympathetic European writers like Jean-Paul Sartre, Europeans cannot understand the existentialist position of the black man and, at any rate, judge the writers as if they were French writers instead of as writers following an authentic African tradition.

The value and limitations of Negritude have generally been obscured in the dialectical process that debate on the movement has followed and in the polemics generated by opposing points of view. Yet, even the most outspoken critics of the concept, like South African Ezekiel Mphahlele and Nigerian Wole Soyinka, although they denounce the strictures and the unwarranted attempt to proliferate Negritude, have conceded that it has historical validity. Senghor attests to that validity in his "Postface," significantly a postscript to a volume of poems which document his conflicting allegiance to Africa and to France. But, as he asserts, Negritude ultimately preaches a humanism that will restore harmony to a divided world. In *Nocturnes*, there is some indication of this humanism in the "Elégies," as we shall see in the next chapter.

Chapter IV

Nocturnes: Negritude and Humanism

Nocturnes (1961) comprises the "Chants pour Signare" first published in 1949 under the title *Chants pour Näett* and five new elegies that had already appeared in periodicals. In their original publication the Songs were dedicated to Senghor's first wife, M$^{\text{me}}$ Ginette Senghor (née Eboué). In the slightly altered version the images and episodes still refer to a black beloved although the substitution of "Signare"[1] for "Näett" -- a name that is now suppressed -- points to a new designee, M$^{\text{me}}$ Collette Senghor, the poet's second wife. The Songs are different from the Elegies in a number of ways. As short love poems they are sensuous, passionate and full of abandon in turn while the longer elegies are more sober, reflective and full of regret. Such differences apart, the two groups of poems have some common features.

Thus three of the five elegies express regret for the Childhood Kingdom which provides the *topos* for many of the poems in "Chants pour Signare." Again, the first elegy, "Elégie de minuit," reproduces some of the sensuous imagery of "Congo" in *Ethiopiques* and of the later lyrics in "Chants pour Signare." But perhaps the most significant correspondence between the two sections of *Nocturnes* is the theme of fused time and space. Although it more properly designates the pastoral and mystical world of childhood and Eden, this space-time continuum may be thought of as a figurative representation of the harmony and communion Senghor seems to have been searching for all his life--for himself, for black people and for all men everywhere. A reading of the poems in *Nocturnes* with this theme of synthesis in mind will prepare the way for an assessment of the success of Senghor's concept of humanism as the ultimate aim of Negritude in contemporary society.

While the juxtaposition of opposites has occurred throughout his poetry, the blend of contradictory or conflicting modes only goes back to "D'autres chants" of *Ethiopiques*, many of which have an affinity with the poems of "Chants pour Signare." One such lyric, "Je ne sais," blends present and past, night and day, death and life in its opening and closing lines:

> I do not know in what time it happened, I always confuse childhood and
>   Eden
> . . . .
> I do not know in what time it happened, I always confuse present and past
> As I mingle Death and Life--a bridge of sweetness joins them.
> (*PO* 148, 149).

The real life situation which gave rise to this poem is the encounter between Senghor, then a youth returning from a visit to Fa'oye, and a Senegalese maiden during the ethereal hour of midday when spirits are seen. The exchange of greetings is peaceful and cordial. The young man is charmed by the girl's courtesy, by her "delightful" speech and "melodious" smile. The exact situation of this meeting in space and time is lost to the poet, but this loss is a matter of indifference. The emotions remain so fresh and pure in his mind, that although buried in the past, they stay alive in him since past and present, death and life, are now linked in him through "a bridge of sweetness."

Senghor recalls the statement he made to the young woman :

> Exquisite sister, keep these golden grains, let them sing the dark
> splendour of your bosom.
> They were for my pretty fiancée, and I had no fiancée. (*PO* 149).

In contrast with this recall of an experience that lives in memory, the lyrics of "Chants pour Signare" are set now in the ambivalent world of childhood and Eden, youth and innocence, now in the splendours of a traditional African landscape where the dead ancestors linger and the poet-pilgrim sings to his loved one in accents that rise, with passionate desire and longing, to the assured tones of conquest and fulfilment. There are, however, some indications of external influences, but these are not as important for the survival of the relationship as are those in the "Epitres à la Princesse."

The ambivalent quality of "Chants pour Signare" can be found even in the descriptive imagery that Senghor uses in these poems. Elements of the mask-poems of *Chants d'ombre* recur. The features of a black mask and a universalized black woman are represented as landscapes and physical elements, or as essences from animal and plant life in accordance with a traditional African world view. The images in the Songs take on an added ambivalent quality: landscapes are described in anthropomorphic terms and the beloved is given the classic features of a mask; at the same time both she and the lover are viewed as elements of physical nature.

The Songs are not, however, a simple catalogue of the lover's passionate desire, the loved one's beauty and their union, but a poetic history of their relationship. The relationship begins in the pastoral world of pre-existence and childhood innocence where the pair has a blood relationship as brother and sister. This descent into the past recreates the glory and splendour of a lost kingdom in contrast with the tension and monotony of modern civilization which is clouded by the shadow of the Second World War. The loved one is Princess of Elissa who is both the past and the present. In quest of her, the poet-pilgrim must treat with the Confederate Princes as the friendship of childhood and youth gives place to the growing passion of love. The poet's wooing begins about the middle of the sequence with a praise-poem to the Princess, but in order to fulfil his desire, the questing lover has to go through the rite of initiation. Only in the final lyrics does he loose the storm of passion that he has thus far withheld, and the lover becomes, not a black goddess of beauty, but a dappled fawn that the black hunter slays.

The pervasive imagery in the Songs is the mask-imagery that extols the dark beauty of the woman whose face has implicitly or explicitly the classic features of an African mask:

Your brows have taken that Eternal stance found on the faces of statues
But there flutters about your mask the bright wing of the seamew.
It is that haunting smile, like the leitmotiv of your melodic face.
("Tu as donc dépouillé," *PO* 179, *NO* 14).

Like a statue, a carved figurehead leaning over the sounding deep
You sang with a shadowy voice, *ndeisane*! the glory of the champion
as he stands.
. . . .
We were coming back from Dyonewar by way of the mangrove swamps, and
listlessly
It was then that under its patina your face today had the dark beauty
of the Eternal. ("Ton visage," *PO* 178, *VO* 13).

Senghor celebrates the Negritude of his beloved in these lines, but there is no indication that he idealizes her at the expense of, say, European values. He calls forth her dignity and grace by investing her with the ancient and modern attributes of the sacred African mask, so that her beauty is less anatomized than invoked through association with the carved mask. A "freak of the divine fancy ("Je t'ai accompagnée," *PO* 172, *NO* 5) emanates from "the bronzed rays" of her face ("J'étais assis," *PO* 175, *NO* 9). When her features are etched out, as in "Chant de l'initié," we learn of the "sun of her smile," the "melodious curve of her cheek" and the "eyelashes . . . rhythmic in the translucent air" (*PO* 192, 193, *NO* 30). The melody and rhythm are not, however, confined to her mask-face but extend to her statuesque body as, moving with the slow dignity of the camel and the lissom splendour of the ostrich, her feet and hips are transformed into musical instruments:

> "Ah! the balafong of her feet and the twittering of the milk-white
> birds!
> The high strings of the koras, the subtle music of her hips!
> It is the melody of the white mehari, the royal tread of the Ostrich!"
> ("Ma Soeur, ces mains de nuit," *PO* 177, *NO* 11).

Senghor deliberately selects images from an African setting. These do not have the same connotations as the images of erotic poetry in the Western tradition for the poet consciously chooses mask-images that reflect an African sensibility. Specifically, the earlier lyrics of the Songs are reminiscent of the contemplative adoration in the mask-poems of *Chants d'ombre*. The images seem to arise out of the reflections of someone who has had a spritual, if not a carnal, orgasm during the worship of well-wrought African masks. But beyond the imagery in the mask-poems of *Chants d'ombre* where the poet contemplates a mute African mask or statue, in these poems the "strange immobility" ("Etait-ce une nuit maghrebine?" *PO* 186, *NO* 22), the "eternities" in the depths of the beloved's eyes ("Pourquoi fuir sur les voiliers migrateurs?" *PO* 188, *NO* 24) and the other features of the loved one's face are merely suggestive elemental graces that adorn her as a living person. The blend of opposite qualities of night and day, past and present, death and life are given a new dimension by the association of the poet's love with both mutable and immutable essences that make her divinely human in her embodiment as the Serer goddess of beauty, Koumba Tam:

> There will be other nights my dear. You will come again to sit in
>   this bank of shadow
> You will always be the same and you will not be the same.
> Does it matter? Through all your transformations, I shall worship the
>   features of Koumba Tam. (*PO* 187, *NO* 23).

Senghor uses another device, the portrayal of woman as landscape and landscape as human, in the poems of "Chants pour Signare." Once more, the image of the landscape as a black woman is reminiscent of the "savannah shuddering under the East Wind's eager caresses" of "Femme noire." The sensuous images also remind one of the physical love Senghor often expresses for his native Joal, but one is also reminded of the nostalgic quality of this love in "Tu as gardé longtemps":

> Long, long have you held between your hands the black face of the
>   warrior
> Held as if already there fell on it a twilight of death.
> From the hill I have seen the sun set in the bays of your eyes.
> When shall I see again, my country, the pure horizon of your face?
> When shall I sit down once more at the dark table of your breast?
> . . . .

I shall see other skies and other eyes
I shall drink at the spring of other mouths cooler than lemons
I shall sleep under the roof of other heads of hair in shelter from storms.
But every year when the rum of springtime sets my memory ablaze
I shall be full of regret for my homeland and the rain from your eyes
on the thirsty savannahs. (*PO* 171-2, *NO* 4).

This apostrophe to the African landscape points to the black woman's earthiness and to the quasi-humanity of the natural world. The longing for homeland, as opposed to the all-pervasive celebration of the past, is one of the few instances of the poet's regret in the Songs. Indeed the only real complaint against the wrongs inflicted by Europe on Africa in the "Chants pour Signare" (apart from the references to the oppression of Civilization) occurs in one of the later lyrics. In this lyric Senghor again invests the African landscape--Mother Africa-- with the same duality to which is added, as in "Masque nègre," a third quality, namely the enduring features of a sacred mask:

My love is a country of salt sands, a Ferlo without dewfall or cry of
any beast

. . . .

My love a landscape razed and quartered, a white land where I am
tenant only.

. . . .

My refuge in that lost countenance, more melodious than a Pongwé mask!
In that land of waters and tanns and of islands floating on the earth.
And I shall build again the fungible dwelling beside that delicate curve
Of a smile enigmatic pointed by the mango tree's dark blue lips.
And I will pasture the calm dreams of the saurian, and as wizard with
eyes of another world
I shall contemplate the eternities in the depths of your eyes.
(*PO* 187-8, *NO* 24).

The opening line of the poem establishes the peace as well as the drought of the parched Serer country whose white salt Senghor has a habit of comparing with the harsh white snow of Europe. But the love is not one of unremitting joy, for the second line quoted suggests the violence and alienation that have come in from the outside, though these are incapable of stifling the song of love. The portrayal of the Joalian landscape's "lost countenance, more melodious than a Pongwé mask" leads to the humanizing of plant life. The process will be carried further in the next poem, by references such as that to the "smile enigmatic pointed by the mango tree's dark blue lips" and a view of the countryside "[b]eyond your lashes and the palm trees of Katamague." In their own way, the saurians, as an extinct species, help to date the African landscape by restoring to it its lost primeval countenance.

The ambivalence or multivalence inherent in the metamorphosis of mask, woman and the natural world is not always clear-cut and the result is a surreal blend of images as in the poem "Elle me force sans jamais répit." Here the black blood, which manifests itself throughout Senghor's poetry as the ancestor, the personal totem, the spirit of the dead fathers, the noble legacy of long generations of royal ancestors, takes the form of the loved one hounding the poet "through the thickets of Time." The sound of the breeze and the rays of sunshine mingle with his recollections of the beloved's voice and eyes in the only poem of the Songs where the name "Signare" is used. In an earlier poem Senghor had admitted to his knowledge of French but pretended to have a barbarous accent; here the insomniac nights of European civilization jar on his nerves and lead to this impassioned outburst as the black blood asserts its sway:

> My God, my God, why do you tear my pagan senses
> shrieking out of me?
> I cannot sing your plain chant that has no swing to it, I cannot dance it.
> (*PO* 189, *NO* 26).

Thus in the Songs the voice of the poet of Negritude who opposes the black world to the world of Europe, though muted, is still heard.

This discussion of the conjunction of images in the Songs illustrates Senghor's fusion of opposites, especially those of life and death. The poet is, however, not preoccupied with the identity of woman, mask and nature at the expense of his passionate desire. In reality, the "Chants pour Signare" are perhaps Senghor's most artistically arranged grouping of poems and their ordering suggests the progressive development of the bond between lover and beloved which leads to a final climax.

After the opening poems of the sequence in which Senghor appropriately prepares his flute to offer melodies to his beloved, the contemporary background to the courtship is vaguely presented in the references to civilization, hints about the Second World War and mention of the poet's own estrangement from his homeland. He will sing of her dark beauty which reminds him of the time of the "father of [his] grandfather"--one of the first excursions into the time before his birth.

Senghor had traced for himself a noble lineage in *Chants d'ombre*. In "Chants pour Signare" he searches back for the genealogy of his beloved "[d]uring the abyssal night in our mother." Somewhere in the womb of time he has "followed [his] unquiet quest" in search of her. Under the name Nyominka she is given an African existence as the daughter of a learned doctor among the Askias. Again as Soyan she has been, in Cuba, the Voodoo priestess of the Enchanted Island and at Amboise she was a poetess playing the blues. In one of several encounters she is told of his longing and thus his love for her is brought into the open.

In a tacit avowal of reincarnation the lady of the Songs is made the black Princess of Elissa, Senghor's ancestral home. A praise-song describes her as an egret of Satang and Sitor, as a *tata* or fortress, the Sacred Serpent and Angel of the Prodigal Son. But (in the original version) the name the poet has chosen for her is Naëtt and in the only song excluded from the second publication of the Songs he declares that he will pronounce her name, using many images echoing those of "Femme noire," the African night in "Que m'accompagnent" and those of Noliwe in "Chaka" of *Ethiopiques*:

> I will pronounce your name, Naëtt, I will declaim you, Naëtt!
> Naëtt, your name is mild like cinnamon, it is the fragrance in which
> the lemon grove sleeps,
> Naëtt, your name is the sugared clarity of blooming coffee trees
> And it resembles the savannah, that blossoms forth under the masculine
> ardour of the midday sun.
> Name of dew, fresher than shadows of tamarind,
> Fresher even than the short dusk, when the heat of the day is silenced.
> Naëtt that is the dry tornado, the hard clap of lightning
> Naëtt, coin of gold, shining coal, you my night, my sun!
> I am your hero, and now I have become your sorcerer, in order to
> pronounce your names.
> Princess of Elissa, banished from Futa on the fateful day.[2]

Since Senghor does not reveal all the metamorphoses of Naëtt, he leaves in doubt whether the day of banishment refers to the invasion by the warlike Malinkes or the exportation of slaves to the New World. And no wonder. For the setting of these poems is the Edenic world where, as lovers, they eat the "slow manna in the Kingdom of. . . Childhood," in the ambience of "the bright nightless summer, the everlasting kiss of lovers, of bride and groom." In the midst of the meshing of past and present Senghor uses the image of the hunt. This image is surrounded by images of purity and innocence, of friendship and blood relationship, of landscapes and masks. The poet-pilgrim has consulted all the dignitaries of the ancient kingdoms on his side and then declares:

> Ah! all I have forgotten Princess! is to consult my battering ram of
> a heart.
> Your restless ramparts could not stand against the spear blade assault
> of my poet's heart. (*PO* 179, *NO* 14).

Once the passion of the lover has been established, the hunting imagery grows bolder as the courtship progresses. At the same time, in keeping with the theme of confounded opposites, the poems of passion are interspersed with the praise-poems, a descent into childhood which includes the time before birth and a movement forward into the present where destruction in the war is going on. The relentless hounding of the poet's blood, the blood of the ancestors and the coltish blood of passionate desire, leads to his own willing submission, as an antelope, to the embrace of the terrible Lion of desire in "Chant de l'initié":

> To the Pilgrim whose eyes are washed with fasting and ashes and
> watching
> There appears at Sunrise on the topmost peak, the head of the Lion
> gules
> In his surreal majesty. Slayer! Terrible One! I falter and fail.
> I have no antilope's horn, I have only a horn full of empty air
> My pouch full and whole. Ah! strike me with your twin lightning
> Terrible sweetness of its roar! inexorable pleasure of its claws!--
> May I die a sudden death to be reborn in the revelation of Beauty!
> Silence, silence upon the shadow. Muffled drum . . . slow drum . . .
> heavy drum . . . black drum. (*PO* 195, *NO* 32-3).

"Chant de l'initié" is a kind of prothalamium announcing the union of the poet-lover and his loved one, Naëtt or Signare. The celebrative note of the first of its four lyrics announces the descent into the ancestral springs by the Black Orpheus who plays to his Eurydice on his ebony flute. The quest develops in the second lyric where the pilgrim loses his way "in the forest of her hair." He cries to his horn for help and then puns on the word in the "Horn under [her] black patina, ivory patiently ripened in black mud." As the pursuit goes on in the third lyric, the beloved once more merges into the savannah as black as himself, the "fire of Death making for rebirth / Rebirth of Sense and Spirit." At the end the poet's "death" as the antelope is a preparation for the bride's own surrender as their roles are reversed in the last two lyrics which sing an epithalamium of consummation.

The twin lyrics "Elle fuit elle fuit" and "Ecoutez les abois" close the section of poems entitled "Chants pour Signare." In them, Senghor dispenses with all reserve and lays bare the stark passions that have been building in intensity throughout the series of love songs. In the first lyric the beloved is presented in her basic character as woman through the image of the antelope as game. Her sacred mask-features are absent from this portrait as the gameful hunter brings her to bay after taking aim "[g]iddy with desire" and then goes in for the kill:

The antelope's jubilant death rattle will intoxicate me, new palm wine
And I will drink long long the wild blood that rises to her heart
The milk blood that flows to her mouth, odours of damp earth.

Am I not the son of Dyogoye? Dyogoye the famished Lion. (*PO* 196, *NO* 34).

In the last line Senghor unmistakably identifies himself as the lover by naming his father, Dyogoye, and by reference to the Lion that became his political symbol. The imagery is provocatively sensual as this Orpheus claims his mate.

If the bold images of "Elle fuit elle fuit" are still subtle and suggest some element of mysticism in the milk blood that the lover drinks, the second lyric, "Ecoutez les abois" is even more explicit in its sexual imagery about the physical union. The dogs and the bullets are all in his belly and he speaks of his yellow watch dogs and the "good rifle sheathed with sacred blood." The final fulfilment of the dream is a wedding of lover and loved one in a union of nature that returns both of them to the elemental landscapes that recur in Senghor's poetry:

I will go leaping over the hills, defying the fear of the winds of the
steppes
Defying the rivers, where virgin bodies drown in the lowest depths of
their grief.
I will climb the sweet belly of the dunes and the ruddy thighs of day
To the shadowy gorges where with a sharp blow I will slay the dappled
fawn of my dream. (*PO* 197, *NO* 35).

Reed and Wake have these lines particularly in mind when they make this general comment on the "Chants pour Signare":

> Above all . . . one is struck by that delicate but frank, and intensely rich sensuality which is typical of all of Senghor's poetry, but which seems to reach its finest expression in these poems. He is writing about his human beloved, but he is also writing about his other beloved, Africa. He sees the one in terms of the African landscape, and the other in terms of woman, creating an interplay of ambiguity of considerable subtlety."[3]

The "Chants pour Signare" indeed contain some of the finest poems of Senghor's career. It is true that the description of Naëtt/

Signare is haunted by the presence of masks; but it is not less true that beyond these characteristics the shimmering warmth of a full-blooded woman shines forth. Senghor seems to be at his best as a love poet preoccupied with the private relationship between himself and his loved one. As a love poet he is at his best with the lyric--hence the prosaic character of some of the Epistles, longer poems concerned as much with external as with internal matters. When he goes beyond the confines of his private world to operate on a larger, universal plane this poet makes himself vulnerable to attack. The poems of Negritude do seem to be the product less of the creative spark felt in the bone and marrow than an intellectual aesthetic conceived in the brain and mind. Reed and Wake are thus not wide of the mark when they say: "Because of their association with *négritude*, his longer poems tend to be the better known, but it may be that posterity will think more of the shorter ones, especially the 'Songs.'"[4]

The racial overtones that were clearly marked in the epic poems of *Ethiopiques* virtually disappear from the landscape of the "Elégies" of *Nocturnes*. In four of these poems, it is as if the struggling, alienated young man in search of his identity has at last found himself and reconciled within himself the contraries of opposition and acceptance, accusation and exoneration, alienation and integration, hate and love. The opposition of black and white values is relinquished in favour of a measure of humanism.

The serenity of the "Elégies" stands out, in comparison with the restlessness of previous volumes. Senghor covers the same terrain of his Childhood Kingdom as in many other poems, but there is a sense of quietude, of a somewhat confident self-effacement as he depicts the poet's role in the imagery of a child's world:

I shall sleep at dawn, my pink doll in my arms
My doll with green eyes and golden, and so wonderful a tongue
Being the tongue of the poem.
("Elégie de minuit," *PO* 200, *NO* 41).

This reaching out to the child's world of innocence is a vain attempt to recapture the past and make it alive in the present. But even though the desire is unrealizable the process of seeking it in the depths of being brings release from the tensions of the real world. It is a world of intense light piercing through the dark of reserve and innocence like the unrelenting lighthouse at Joal. It is a world in which the deep earth of the beloved is laid open to the black sower's passion, a world of sweetness and pleasure but also one of remorse and despair.

In the "Elégies" death and life are not simply compounded: they become necessary correlatives. Thus at the same time that the elegiac note of lost innocence and the impending death of the poet-hero is sounded, the rhythmic dance for the erection of the phallus that guarantees rebirth and release from ignorance and innocence is proposed and "[l]ife holds death at bay":

Ah! die to childhood, let the poem die the syntax fall apart, let the
    inessential words be swallowed up.
The weight of the rhythm is enough, no need of word-cement to build on
    the rock the City of tomorrow.

Let the sun rise from the sea of shadows
Blood! The waves are the colour of dawn.
("Elegie des circoncis," *PO* 201, *NO* 43).

The poet will return to his Childhood Kingdom in the other elegies. In "Elégie des circoncis" he accepts his maturity as he is initiated into manhood. This maturity is concerned with leadership. He implores the sage to impart wisdom to him. For this reason, the function of the song or poem is given new dimensions. Hitherto the poem had been used to nourish the poet's grief, his isolation and deprivation, the wrongs done to him as representative of the African race and also to embody his own rejection of the oppressor's self-confident superiority. Now with all superfluities cut away, only the rhythm which is left in the song (in this case the work song) can feed the people as the poet becomes lamarch[5] and father. In an extended metaphor, the poem which had been used to announce the good news, itself becomes the phoenix, symbol of rebirth after the marriage of nocturnal shadows and the light of dawn:

Master of the Initiates, I know I need your wisdom to break the cypher
    of things
To learn my office as father, as lamarch[5]
To measure exactly the field of my duties, to share out the harvest
    forgetting neither worker nor orphan.
The song is not only a charm, by it the woolly heads of my flock are fed.
The poem is bird-serpent, marriage of shadow and dawnlight
The Phoenix rises, he sings with wings extended, over the carnage of words.
(*PO* 202, *NO* 44).

Apart from the celebration of personal repose the elegies of *Nocturnes* add little dimension to Senghor's philosophical development. The nostalgic strain under the surface of the poems is no new feature, since Senghor is pre-eminently a poet of longing and regret. One of the elegies is in fact a dedication to *saudades*, the nostalgia of a Portuguese origin--at least with reference to the name "Senghor." In this "return to sources" (a tendentious feature of Negritude poetry) Senghor discovers the origin of his name in a book at Coimbra and the discovery sets off a train of thought concerning his origin and the speculation as to whether only the name is Portuguese or whether his drop of Portuguese blood has been submerged in a sea of blackness. The role as leader which emerges, Senghor has already adopted in the longer poems of *Chants d'ombre*. The interplay between life and death, present and past, for its part, is given focus in *Ethiopiques* and in "Chants pour Signare." Perhaps the only other significant distinction of the elegies is the suggestion that the era of rebirth and reconciliation is finally at hand.

Senghor's discovery of his origin in the "Elégie des Saudades" is accompanied by an insatiable thirst that drinks up all the adventures recounted and all the waters of the rivers: Niger, Congo, Zambezi, Amazon, Ganges. He reverts to the mythic third day of fecund creation. He not only acknowledges the possibility of European blood, however negligible, in him, but he also raises his mind above the battles that were fought in times past, although the question as to whether these were inter-tribal or inter-racial is left deliberately ambiguous. These were fights over futile things, Senghor affirms, as he looks back from the period of incipient independence in Africa. Considering the woeful lament on the destruction of his ancestral home by invading Malinkes and the indignities done to Africa by European masters, such an admission represents a reversal of Senghor's original position even if it also manifests a deepened insight into human frailties and a broadening sense of humanism.[6]

After the drought caused by the drinking up of the rivers in "Elégie des Saudades" Senghor makes, in his fourth elegy, "Elégie des eaux," one of the most gallant gestures of reconciliation to be found in all his poetry. He invokes the elemental power of fire and water. Everywhere there is suffering at the hand of a jealous God; the cities in their arrogance are "[t]ransfixed with poisonous lightning"; people are without water, the rivers without sources or resources. Senghor first calls down burning fire on the wickedness that has led to the drought which is a dearth of spiritual values among godless peoples. Subsequently, he invokes waters of purification, mercy and unity and the unclean waters about unclean cities with their sorrows and aborted dreams which will become purified by the cleansing agency of the poem.

But the invocation is ultimately directed to God himself who has made the poet of lowly birth "Master of Language." Senghor asks for rain:

Lord, harken to my voice. LET IT RAIN. It rains
And you have opened from your arms of thunder the cataracts of forgiveness.
Rain on New York, on Ndiongolar on Ndialakhar
Rain on Moscow and Pompidou, on Paris and suburbs, on Melbourne on Messina on Morzine
Rain on India, China--four hundred thousand Chinese are drowned, twelve million Chinese are saved, the righteous and the wicked
Rain on the Sahara and on the Middle West, on the desert on the wheat-

lands and the ricelands
On straw heads and wool heads. (*PO* 208, *NO* 51).

Christ is no longer either black or white but a universal Christ who deals justly with one and all. The appeal is not for the black race or even the toiling peasantry throughout the world but for just and unjust alike, "straw heads and wool heads," rich and poor. The rain itself is an ambivalent symbol that relieves thirst and drought but also causes floods: "four hundred thousand Chinese are drowned, twelve million Chinese are saved, the righteous and the wicked." God's mercy is generous and while it spares both believer and infidel its visitation is not always without adverse repercussions, for sin must be expiated through sacrifice. If Senghor's final statement in this poem, that is, that life is reborn with the "colour of presence" ("couleur de présence"), was the final note in his poetry it would be the most fitting conclusion to a humanism that seeks absolute reconciliation as its ultimate end. But the way of poetry is not the way of the world. There are unpleasant realities in human relations which will make futile things substantial. Senghor closes with an elegy to a trade union leader, Aynina Fall, who shed his blood for the unity of black peoples.

The spirit of pan-humanism and even of pan-African unity is ultimately a putative ideal which Senghor approaches more closely in his poetry and preaching than in the practical world of politics. And while his reputation as a poet may rest on his love poetry, an assessment of his poetry is incomplete without a consideration of the significance of Negritude. In a comparatively recent essay, "Problématique de la Négritude," Senghor cites Césaire's definition of Negritude which is totally in keeping with the development in his prose-poem: "Negritude is the simple recognition of the fact of being black, and the acceptance of this fact, of our destiny as blacks, our history and our culture."[7] The first influential and still perhaps the most perspicacious articulation of Negritude, however, has been Jean-Paul Sartre's "Orphée noir" in which he has warned against the perpetuation of the movement. In this preface to Senghor's anthology Sartre observes that Negritude is an open-ended doctrine. According to him, its domain encompasses a wide range of ideas, attitudes and subjects, from regret for the lost world of childhood to the vision of an apocalyptic dawn in the city of tomorrow; from contraction into a pantheistic fusion with the world of Nature to an expansion that coincides with the whole history of Humanity; from an existential attitude, "a certain affective attitude towards the world," to an objective ensemble of Negro-African traditions. It embraces many more ideas than Sartre can cite, including ideas of necessity and liberty, questions of fact and value either widespread among the black people or restricted to a few select individuals; a choice between an unattainable Platonic Archetype and a systematic characterization of the black soul, and between an empirical intuition and the moral conception of a black ethos.[8] Sartre's caution against the elevation of the concept of Negritude to a fundamental and unchangeable principle derives from the circumstances of its conception, from the very changeableness of its formulation and from the inherent contradictions of its application.

Sartre's formulation of Negritude was descriptive rather than prescriptive. Senghor, as the foremost theorist and defender within the movement, has never gone beyond Sartre's description of the concept, except to amplify one or other of its themes and, with other poets of the movement, to make these concepts prescriptive. In addition, far from removing the inconsistencies inherent in the doctrine, Senghor seems to have compounded them through constant redefinition. Thus there is an old Negritude, the polemic Negritude of the nineteen thirties, and a new or reformed Negritude which accommodates his humanism as well as the rather different ideas and ideals of the young black writers of Africa and the diaspora. In his attempts to broaden the application of the movement within the guidelines suggested in "Orphée noir" he has resorted to two of Sartre's own formulations. These concern an existentialist view of the world ("a certain affective attitude towards the world") and the embracing of the African cultural heritage ("the sum-total of the African's cultural values"). To particularize these generalizations Senghor has elevated the qualities of rhythm and emotion to the level of primal essences. An individual or a work of art specifically Negro is, according to Senghor, distinguished by the force of its rhythm or emotion, from the sacred masks and statues to the song and dance of an African feast.

Senghor contends that culture, defined as "the mind of civilization," is the supreme goal of human society and human progress. It is more encompassing than civilization which is, after all, the aggregate of the laws of culture. It is superior to and indeed "the prior condition and ultimate goal"[9] of politics and economics. Senghor's elevation of culture above politics and economics reveals his conservatism. In the nineteen thirties when the doctrine of Negritude was established, the black poets in France had nothing else to fall back on save their African heritage. Political awareness was by slow degrees developed among the subjugated black peoples whose economies were controlled by the occupying powers. The divorce between culture and politics or economics is not only an expedient that seeks to proliferate the doctrine of Negritude as a viable and functional modus operandi for African development but also indicates a refusal to integrate the new realities of independent Africa.

The distinction between art and politics also brings to mind the criticism Soyinka levels against Senghor's apparent separation of the two. Senghor in fact acknowledges that politics and economics are important, but asserts that they are secondary to culture. In this he represents the opposite pole from Ghana's former president, Kwame Nkrumah, whose pro-independence slogan was a biblical adaptation: "Seek ye first the political kingdom and all these things shall be added unto you." Senghor, by contrast, urges that the cultural kingdom is primary and supreme.[10]

It is significant that neither Nkrumah nor Senghor has succeeded in establishing his particular doctrine. Nkrumah discovered that political power divorced from economic power was nothing. Senghor has had to make many compromises in his political career. He moved from the advocacy of a confederated French union with French Africa as overseas France to an acceptance of the idea of independence. He later accepted a much more limited federation between Senegal and Mali and then withdrew Senegal from the federation to become its first President in 1960. He has espoused an African socialism and then yielded to capitalism so that the divisions between élite and peasant in Senegal are as marked today as they were under the French. He has successfully quelled opposition to his regime, once when his Prime Minister, Mamadou Dia, a long-time ally, was imprisoned for allegedly plotting to overthrow his government and later by widespread police action against dissidents. He has remarked, disappointedly, in one interview that the United States of Africa is not for tomorrow because of the immense problems in the way, problems that are for the most part nationalist, economic and political. This dim view, no doubt, casts a shadow on the drive for black unity pledged in the last of the elegies. In addition, his dream of a united Africa which he quotes a fellow black writer as predicting, earlier this century, as an accomplished fact in the twenty-first century seems no whit nearer.

Senghor is, in the end, a theorist who finds considerable difficulty in putting his theories into practice, perhaps because his theories, reflecting in their eclectic nature the complementarity he advocates, have more ideality than reality, an aesthetic unity which disintegrates when subjected to the variables of experience and implementation. Past history affords us a yardstick to measure not only our progress to the present but also our chances of success for the future. Poetry of the kind Senghor has written invites us to re-enter the Childhood Kingdom most familiar to him. If we went in to stay, it would be another matter. But the masks of the sacred groves are not intended for mute contemplation throughout eternity. Although they may partake of a ritual and artistic essence that goes back to the womb of time, as artifacts they are subject, like us, to the ravages of time. Unless one can make those immobile masks come alive in essence and, in reality, breathe on him and on his own the wisdom of the fathers, the contemplation of these delicate and exquisite figures may bring pleasure and delight but little else. The optimism which shines above and beyond the regret, the complaints, the longing and the passionate outbursts against oppression in Senghor's poetry is perhaps the result of a fervent hope embedded in his Roman Catholic faith. It is certainly not shared by either novelist Chinua Achebe or poet-playwright Wole Soyinka.

Chapter V

Things Fall Apart: From Culture to Anarchy

I

Chinua Achebe is an Ibo from the village of Ogidi in Eastern Nigeria. Like Senghor, although in a different way, he has been concerned with the collision and interpenetration of conflicting cultures. In his four novels to date he has dealt with the activities and fortunes of fictional individuals at carefully selected moments of history. His first novel, *Things Fall Apart*, establishes a small Ibo village community as the centre of a vision of cultural and political history which will expand as his work develops to embrace in a "widening gyre" tribe, region, nation, and finally, in his last novel, black Africa itself.

The title and epigraph of his first novel are taken from Yeats's poem "The Second Coming." Both title and epigraph can stand, with some elaboration and extension, as the underlying theme of his novels:

Turning and turning in the widening gyre
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;
Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world.
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
The best lack all conviction, while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity.

The anarchy that Yeats saw as imminent at the end of the Great Year (calculated from the birth of Christ) was marked by a sinister transformation of values as, from outside, the formless chaos challenged the forces of civilization with its own antithetical values. In the flux of conflicting forces, as the second part of the passage quoted indicates, the "ceremony of innocence" is drowned in a tide of anarchy. "The best lack all conviction, while the worst / Are full of passionate intensity." At this moment of history force and passion are manifest not in the best but in the worst of the conflicting elements. Yeats in 1921 had seen the cataclysmic events at the beginning of the twentieth century as the outward manifestations of a revelation like the birth of Christ some two thousand years before; Achebe, in 1958, viewed the coming of the white man to Umuofia at the turn of the century as a comparable phenomenon which would prove to be a mixed blessing.

But a response to Yeats's vision of the history of civilization is not the only dimension of Achebe's creative imagination. Patterns are important and the ordering of events into structures and shapes is one of the primary functions of the human interpreter who perhaps inevitably aligns and realigns events in accordance with his own particular bias. As a novelist Achebe is concerned with philosphic structures and historical perspectives but he is concerned also with human psychology. As a novelist with an essentially tragic vision he has found Yeats's cosmic vision compatible since he too sees human beings caught in a cycle of fate in which the circumstance of flux and change plays an integral part in the human dilemma and helps to deepen the personal conflicts that often lead to tragedy. In the novels themselves it is the human response to historical pressures as he interprets them which is the subject matter of his novels. The dominant tone of his novels is one of tragic irony.

Arrow of God perhaps best illustrates Achebe's use of dramatic situations to articulate the tragic irony which he sees in the human interactions in which his characters are involved. Although this novel was his third it portrays the generation immediately after the *fin de siècle* "Scramble for Africa,"[1] the generation which the characters in his first novel *Things Fall Apart* represent. The crucial issue in the British colonial administration of the years following the First World War was set forth in Lord Lugard's *The Dual Mandate*.[2] In principle, Lugard and his supporters suggested the extension of the policy of "Indirect Rule" through which natural rulers or specially created chieftains, in areas where none existed before, would be made directly responsible to the colonial administration.[3] One of the men chosen for this new honour is Ezeulu, the principal character of *Arrow of God*. Ezeulu is the religious leader whose position has become largely functional because the men of real power are the rich from another village. His aloof independence and his quest for real power make him a controversial figure within his own society. His haughty bearing and self-will precipitate a headlong collision between him and the local British administration, headed by Winterbottom, when he rejects the offer of their newly created chieftaincy. The internal conflicts in each system and the external barriers to communication between traditional African and modern Western authorities offer a unique opportunity for Achebe's exploration of human conflict and tragedy.

Since Achebe's basic view is one of a society (and by extension a whole world) steadily disintegrating, the impact of centrifugal forces in the political world has a destructive effect on man's spirituality. The character in his fiction who best exemplifies this moral decay is Obi Okonkwo of his second novel *No Longer at Ease*. Small wonder then that for the epigraph and title of his second published novel Achebe draws on lines written by the poet of *The Waste Land*. He chooses significantly the concluding lines of Eliot's poem, "Journey of the Magi," which articulate the anguish experienced when man is exposed to conflicting religious beliefs or conflicting ontologies. The Magi's journey to Bethlehem marks the end of an era. The speaker of Eliot's poem reflects:

> We returned to our places, those Kingdoms
> But no longer at ease here, in the old dispensation,
> With an alien people clutching their gods.
> I should be glad of another death.

The birth of Christ was for the Magi not only a birth but also a death, their death, for as the sages of a passing world and the harbingers of a new, they feel themselves torn by the conflicting pulls of both, although we expect them ultimately to die to the old and be born to the new. Obi Okonkwo, in a much shrunken parallel, after a pilgrimage to England in search of the philosopher's stone, returns to Nigeria. He has, in the process, drifted from the moorings of a religio-cultural haven provided both by the traditional religion of his grandfather and the African flavoured Christianity of his catechist father. Caught in the vortex of an ambivalent society whose values he imbibes only superficially, he founders amid the buffetings of circumstances.

In contrast with the historical analogue which his situation in a way travesties, Obi's spiritual and ethical hollowness hardly presages a new millennium of comparable importance. Thus, the birth of Nigeria and of other new nations in Africa do not bring in the golden age. In a few short years the nostalgia for a return to the Africa of the empires and kingdoms has been swept away by the reality of a new nightmare of anarchy. Viewed thus, the whole gamut of events seems to follow the unmistakable trajectory from the original harmony in Umuofia to the eventual disorder around Bori, capital of the unnamed African state which is the scene of action in *A Man of the People*, Achebe's most recent novel.

Because Achebe's novels are, in the main, situation pieces in which misadventure, misapprehension and misconception breed tragic irony, tragic conflict and personal or corporate disaster, his major themes are more readily illustrated than analyzed. In addition, the simple episodic progression of the novels belies the complex structure and symbolism inherent in them. In order to discuss these complexities, the reading of the novels that follows frequently goes into detail about the unfolding of the human drama that the novelist exhibits. Achebe is writing neither a historical treatise nor a study of the mask *per se*. But all the time mask and history are there, either on the surface or deep down, as fundamental themes which reinforce and link the personal tragedies of individual and society in the tragi-comedy of the human condition.

II

In a paper entitled "The Novelist as Teacher" Chinua Achebe discusses his espousal of an African revolution in this way:

> Here, then, is an adequate revolution for me to espouse--to help my society regain its belief in itself and put away the complexes of years of denigration and self-denigration. And it is essentially a question of education in the best sense of that word. Here, I think, my aims and the deepest aspirations of my society meet. For no thinking African can escape the pain of the wound in our soul. You have all heard of the African personality; of African democracy, of the African way to socialism, of negritude, and so on. They are all props we have fashioned at different times to help us get on our feet again. Once we are up we shall not need any of them any more. But for the moment it is in the nature of things that we may need to counter racism with what Jean-Paul Sartre has called an anti-racist racism, to announce not just that we are as good as the next man but that we are better.[4]

Achebe had a consciously educational motive in mind when he wrote *Things Fall Apart*. He wanted, first of all, to evoke the pattern of life in a traditional African setting, notably its order, harmony, poetry and beauty for the benefit of the younger generation. To make the picture objective in the novel, he balances this portrait with accounts that reveal shortcomings in the society. Next, he wished to document the process of the colonial experience and its impact on traditional culture. The arrival of the white man in the latter part of the novel turns the traditional setting in Umuofia into an archetypal colonial situation that reveals a classic conflict of cultures. The old order is upset, overridden by forces from outside that replace the value system of Umuofia with strange new ideas and ways. Achebe also intended to show that the experience did not bring total gain or total loss to the African. The fate of Okonkwo, the central character of the novel, illustrates the loss of dignity suffered by the African during the colonial period. The desertion of his son, Nwoye, who joins the Christians, confirms that, for some at least in the African community, the new order provided a welcome alternative.

The narrative voice in *Things Fall Apart* reports the events and episodes in the novel in a detached, ironic vein. It treats both black and white men in the novel with dispassionate objectivity and is sparing in direct comments on individual characters or situations. The narrator's economy in terms of direct commentary seems to suggest that each individual must draw his own conclusions about the significance of the events described. Achebe does not, however, leave the interpretation of events to chance. He has, instead, through careful selection and arrangement of details, through structure and symbolism and through the interactions of characters at crucial points in the unfolding story striven to make the reader adopt a certain point of view. Briefly stated, this point of view is a corrective to the widely held belief that African peoples lived "one long night of savagery from which the first Europeans acting on God's behalf delivered them."[5] The subsequent examination of the novel focuses on the episodes, symbols and narrative strategies that help establish Achebe's point of view as he begins his study of history and culture in African society.

In *Things Fall Apart* Achebe has brought together the story of Okonkwo and the cultural history of an imaginary society at a critical moment in time. The two levels of the story are contrapuntal, for in Okonkwo's predicament we see the futile struggle of a man against an inexorable tide of change which finally overwhelms him. The tribe's own impotence is clearly marked in its dazed passivity when other messengers are allowed to escape after Okonkwo has cut down one of their number. It is Okonkwo's own moment of truth as well as the tribe's tacit acceptance of defeat. Far from being the lofty and detached novelist who depicts but does not analyze the situations he evokes, through a finely etched symbolism achieved by a careful ordering of imagery and allegoric or symbolic episodes, Achebe makes some very pointed observations that come to light under searching scrutiny.

Although the central theme of the novel, as suggested by the title, is the breakdown of order, more than half the novel is devoted to the recapturing of order and harmony in Umuofia and peace between its inhabitants and their neighbours. Achebe displays throughout the book that there are internal disputes, occasional violations of taboo, painful privations of some inhabitants because of the law and appropriate modifications of law and custom when the general welfare requires it; but such incidents are departures from the norm of stability, peace and contentment. The novelist's preoccupation with the ordered life in Umuofia indicates something beyond a desire either to pay tribute to the forbears of a vanished era or to provide object lessons to their younger descendants who are living today. The structure is symbolic of the longevity of the tradition before the forces of anarchy swiftly take over. But, all the time that he is depicting the viable society that Umuofia represents, Achebe is also foreshadowing its doom. Through symbolic episodes and *motifs* the most important of which are the locust gathering episode, the stories of the albino, the leper and the white man on an iron horse, the fable of Vulture and Rain, the references to reverses such as hanging as well as to the functional and religious implications of the mask we obtain a clear indication of culture becoming anarchy.[6]

The locust gathering episode is a seemingly unobtrusive anecdote about the rich variety of life in Umuofia. The account is placed between the brief story of Ikemefuna's sojourn in the Okonkwo household in Chapter Seven and the announcement and fulfilment of his sacrificial slaying in that same chapter. The narrative voice is that of a *raconteur* whose account we realize is episodic rather than cumulative as we learn first of Ikemefuna and his influence on Nwoye, and are then given an example of Nwoye's favourite story balanced against a brief outline of Okonkwo's manly tales of inter-tribal wars. The story of the locusts, when it does begin, is introduced in the same legendary style as that used in the story of Ikemefuna.

> In this way the moons and the seasons passed. And then the locusts came. It had not happened for many a long year. The elders said locusts came once in a generation, reappeared every year for seven years and then disappeared for another lifetime. They went back to their caves in a distant land, where they were guarded by a race of stunted men. And then after another lifetime these men opened the caves again and the locusts came to Umuofia (*TFA* VIII, 49).

Legend becomes reality when the locusts appear in Umuofia to find Okonkwo and the two boys repairing the walls of their compound. The arrival of the locusts is greeted with joy by all the villagers and, when gathered later, the locusts are savoured as a delicacy by all including Okonkwo, Nwoye and Ikemefuna. In this happy after-harvest setting the announcement of Ikemefuna's imminent death registers itself with the shock of suddenness as well as finality. The two occurrences--the story of the locusts and that of Ikemefuna--are respectively dismissed by the villagers as they relish the dried locusts "eaten with solid palm-oil" (*TFA* VII, 51) and by Okonkwo who tries to wipe out the memory of his involvement in the ritual murder by drinking copious draughts of palm wine. But each account, apart from its basis in the real world experience of *Things Fall Apart*, has a figurative import which becomes clearer as the novel progresses, the one with political, the other with religious, overtones.

Achebe uses the descent of the locusts on Umuofia to symbolize the advent of the white man. The link is established in Part II of the novel, during Okonkwo's second year of exile in his mother's village of Mbanta. Obierika, who is visiting him, tells the "strange and terrible story" (*TFA* XV, 124) of the wiping out of Abame. On hearing that a white man appeared in Abame Okonkwo promptly suggests that the white man was an albino but his friend demurs. Obierika's speech describing the appearance of the white man is worth quoting because of its symbolic treatment of the first contact between black and white in this region and its representation of the gulf of ignorance and misunderstanding that divides the two cultures:

> "He was not an albino. He was quite different." He sipped his wine. "And he was riding an iron horse. The first people who saw him ran away, but he stood beckoning to them. In the end the fearless ones went near and touched him. The elders consulted their Oracle and it told them that the strange man would break their clan and spread destruction among them." Obierika again drank a little of his wine. "And so they killed the white man and tied his iron horse to their sacred tree because it looked as if it would run away to call the man's friends. I forgot to tell you another thing which the Oracle said. It said that other white men were on their way. They were locusts, it said, and the first man was their harbinger sent to explore the terrain. And so they killed him." (*TFA* XV, 125).

In order to understand the full import of this passage it is well to recall an earlier conversation--the one between Okonkwo and Obierika three days after the slaying of Ikemefuna. The bride price of Obierika's daughter has been fixed and the discussion leading to the following exchange centres on the theme that "what is good in one place is bad in another":

> "It is like the story of white men who, they say, are white like this piece of chalk," said Obierika. He held up a piece of chalk, which every man kept in his *obi* and with which his guests drew lines

> on the floor before they ate kola nuts. "And these white men, they say, have no toes."
>
> "And have you never seen them?" asked Machi.
>
> "Have you?" asked Obierika.
>
> "One of them passes here frequently," said Machi. "His name is Amadi."
>
> Those who knew Amadi laughed. He was a leper, and the polite name for leprosy was 'the white skin.'" (*TFA* VIII, 67).

These two passages show a marked contrast in attitudes. The light-hearted tone of the dialogue and the speculative account of the white man in the bride-price episode is replaced with a serious, a virtual eyewitness report by a much more informed Obierika. The white man is a strange phenomenon to the Abame villagers and they run away from him. Yet, after the few fearless ones have approached and touched him, the clansmen, acting purely out of the instinct for self-preservation, decide to kill the lone white man and thus preserve their clan. But although the villagers hope to subvert it, the message of the Oracle is clear: this is the first of many white men and whether or not they kill him, as the forerunner of many more, he will break up their clan.

The white men are like locusts because they spread destruction over a people's harvest of tradition and order. When the people of Abame see their harbinger, they despatch him quickly without waiting to see the size of the swarm. They thus leave themselves open to the destruction that comes to them. In the actual locust episode earlier mentioned, the people of Umuofia, following their elders' counsel, patiently wait for nightfall when the locusts' wings would be wet with dew. They are also fortunate that the locusts arrive after the harvest season so that their crops are not destroyed. Hence the appearance of the first swarm of locusts that overshadows Umuofia produces a shout of joy from the people; and the solid mass which follows is "a tremendous sight, full of power and beauty" (*TFA* VII, 50).

There is some ambivalence, then, about the shod white man who, according to legend, has no toes. Just as locusts, hungry for food, "settled on every tree . . . on every blade of grass . . . on the roofs and . . . the bare ground" (*TFA* VII, 51) breaking mighty tree branches with their sheer weight, so too the white man's all-pervasive influence crumbles existing structures. But the locusts are also edible and the Umuofians are able to savour them as a rare delicacy; likewise the white man who destroys the old order with his power also brings many benefits never before enjoyed by the villagers.

The humorous reference to Amadi as a white man in the bride price episode reveals not only the Ibo art of conversation but also introduces one of the central symbols of the novel. Thus, the earlier portion of Obierika's speech during his first visit to Mbanta characterizes the repulsiveness of the white man in the image of leper or man of "the white skin." Initially the people of Abame run away from the white man on the iron horse, but when the fearless ones draw near and touch him, they receive the taint of the leper. The rest of the novel shows how the contagion of "the white skin" spreads, but it is in *Arrow of God*, Achebe's third novel, that the situation is most aptly described when Ezeulu muses on Christianity after sending his son to the mission school:

> Ezeulu was becoming afraid that the new religion was like a leper. Allow him a handshake and he wants an embrace. Ezeulu had already spoken strongly to his son who was becoming more strange every day. But what would happen if, as many oracles prophesied, the white man had come to take over the land and rule? In such a case it would be wise to have a man of your family in his band. (*AG* IV, 51).

In embracing the white man, the people of Umuofia little realize that they are being drawn themselves into quicksands that will soon pull them under, for all that the water is only ankle deep (*TFA* XXIV, 183).

The white man's ambivalent position makes him difficult to contend with. *Things Fall Apart*, in accordance with the central theme, largely depicts the destructive element in the white man's relations with the villagers so that whatever advantages he may have brought are only implicit and will be elaborated only in *Arrow of God*, its historical sequel. In *Things Fall Apart*, the images of the leper and the locust emphasize the insidious and predatory nature of the colonial administration which worked hand in glove with the missionaries for the "pacification" of indigenous peoples. The image of leper is double-edged. It suggests the spread of the new order like a contagious disease which maims or destroys those it infects; also, because the white man,as "leper," has contracted a disease of "untouchables" the District Commissioner's refusal to witness the removal of Okonkwo's body because he believes that "such attention would give the natives a poor opinion of him" (*TFA* XXV, 187) is ironical. Since the villagers regard albinos as freaks of creation, Okonkwo's suggestion that the white man who first appeared in Abame was an albino is yet another hint about the way in which the villagers react to the white man's physical appearance. The razing of Abame, for its part, shows how, in one fell swoop, the magical power of the white man was established for all the neighbouring clans to see. Thus, contrary to a once popular supposition, Achebe does doff the mantle of detachment to make searing comments about colonial practices.

Situational irony, however, is directed against Africans and Europeans alike. In his account of the wiping out of Abame, Obierika mentions the fact that the people of Abame, after killing the white man, hang his "iron horse" to their sacred tree for it seemed to them that it would run away to call the man's friends. Their ignorance about the function of the white man's bicycle is as profound as that of the DC who claims, "We have a court of law where we judge cases and administer justice just as it is done in my own country under a great queen" (*TFA* XXIII, 175) without taking local custom into consideration. Little do the villagers know that the prominence of the bicycle on their sacred tree will bring the white man's friends more readily than if they had destroyed it completely. A bicycle on their sacred tree is an anomaly which can be redeemed by understanding. The summary slaughter of Abame means that tradition, represented by the sacred tree, instead of being accommodated, is forced to surrender to the brute force of modernism.

One of Okonkwo's difficulties in coming to grips with the new dispensation is that he refuses to accept its pervasive impact on the society. As usual, it is Obierika who outlines to the baffled Okonkwo lately returned from exile the wave of fear that gripping the people renders them impotent before a superior force and a superior strategy:

> "It is already too late," said Obierika sadly. "Our own men and our sons have joined the ranks of the stranger. They have joined his religion and they help to uphold his government. If we should try to drive out the white men in Umuofia we should find it easy. There are only two of them. But what of our own people who are following their way and have been given power? They would go to Umuru and bring the soldiers, and we would be like Abame." (*TFA* XX, 159).

Obierika's summing up indicates the threat of force that keeps the Umuofia clansmen from challenging the white administration as does the fact that their clansmen are quislings for the white man. Abame's fate is a constant reminder and, unlike Okonkwo, most people realize that the days are over when a war can be fought over four market weeks and Umuofians can proudly boast that they killed twelve of the enemy, losing only two on their side (*TFA* XXIV, 180): now a whole clan can be laid waste in a day.

This view of colonization runs counter to the spirit of altruism--bearing the torch of progress and civilization to "uncivilized" and "uncultured" peoples--which is the projected rationale of European conquest and empire. As Achebe clearly shows, the autochthonous people desire an annexation of the new ideas rather than a *quid pro quo*. And although some of the customs such as the abandonment of twins and the ostracism of a sect which bring hardship to a segment of the population are banned or rendered ineffectual by the new dispensation, others such as imprisonment and hanging are introduced. Moreover, the dispensation of justice leaves much to be desired. In Part I a court is held presided over by the *egwugwu*, the masked spirits whose acknowledged duty is not to punish but to reconcile, to place emphasis not on the wrong committed but on the way to set matters right between disputants (Ch. X). In Part III Okonkwo and five other elders who have committed no crime are summoned by the District Commissioner and promised justice and protection, but the men are treacherously overpowered and imprisoned. Another example of corrupt practices also emerges when the court messengers swell the fine of two hundred bags of cowries imposed by the District Commissioner to two hundred and fifty for their own profit. The new order, then, far from maintaining the equilibrium depicted earlier in the novel, upsets it and leaves the people divided, except in their fear of reprisals. In the circumstances, the only redeeming virtues of colonization are its efficiency and its dedication to an idea as Marlow (Conrad's narrator in *Heart of Darkness*, written in the eighteen nineties) points out, not without irony:

> What saves us is efficiency--the devotion to efficiency. . . . The conquest of the earth, which mostly means the taking it away from those who have a different complexion or slightly flatter noses than ourselves, is not a pretty thing when you look into it too much. What redeems it is the idea only. An idea at the back of it; not a sentimental pretence but an idea; and an unselfish belief in the idea--something you can set up, and bow down before, and offer a sacrifice to. . . ."[7]

The idea which commands this idolatry, as Marlow's aunt graphically puts it, is that of "weaning those ignorant millions from their horrid ways." In the colonial setting, church and state, long since divorced in the home country, arrange a *mariage de convenance*, so that the administration backs up with brute force what the church seeks to achieve by subtlety and subterfuge.

Umuofia is a society whose religious, social, economic and political activities are not separate entities but are dynamic aspects of the same reality. Of these, the religious element has pre-eminence, so that every action or inaction seems to have some religious significance which maintains or upsets the delicate equilibrium between health, both physical and spiritual, and illness or disaster. Ani, the earth goddess and the most important deity, as well as other gods and spirits, benevolent or capricious, must be propitiated by individual and clan through rites and offerings. In addition, the individual's *chi* or personal god and his ancestors must be offered sacrifices as well as invoked for aid in personal affairs, no matter what the domain. The *chi* or destiny of the individual is an abstract quality, but the *ikenga* is, like the mask, a carving. Unlike the mask, however, which generally has wide importance, the *ikenga* stands for the strength of the individual (cp. *AG* II, 29).

In *Things Fall Apart* the mask invariably has a sacred function. It serves as a unique symbol in the spiritual hierarchy. Each major deity has its priest and its shrine where its mask is kept. Some of the most sacred deities are never seen by ordinary people and communicate only through a priest or priestess. Agbala, the Oracle of the Hills and Caves, is most frequently mentioned in *Things Fall Apart*. Okonkwo's father, Unoka, consulted it in adversity, and was told by Chika, the priestess of the Oracle, to go home and work like a man. Chielo, a later priestess, demands on behalf of the Oracle, the surrender of Ezinma, the *ogbanje* sibling of Okonkwo and his second wife

Ekwefi. This demand results in a tense and mysterious situation in the novel. This same Oracle ordains the death of Ikemefuna.

Since life in Umuofia is dominated by the religious element, it is not surprising that the panel of judges who settle disputes is composed of nine *egwugwu*. According to the African world view, a man increases in wisdom as he grows older because he is drawing closer to the land of spirits and is beginning to commune with the dead. The dead can be reincarnated and the prayer of every individual is that his next life will be at least as successful as the present one, and perhaps more so. The greatest impact of the ancestors on the living, however, is the role they can play as knowledgeable beings and as intercessors on behalf of the living in the immensely powerful other-world. What better choice, then, for deciding issues of momentous significance than the dead fathers of the clan who are in communion with the gods and spirits of the clan, speak an esoteric language reserved for spirits and physically return as masks to the land of the living?

As Achebe makes plain during the funeral of Ezeudu (who is a virtual ancestor even before his death on account of his age), not all of the mask-ancestors who appear are very powerful. In fact, some are quite harmless. The occasion of the death of a grandee is a cause for rejoicing at his elevation and calls for participation by both the living and the dead. An occasion such as this provides an opportunity for reaffirming the existence, the power and the terror of many of these awesome presences. Their very appearance can instill fear and trembling in the people, especially since some of the masks are very violent and can send not only the spectators but also their very attendants scurrying for cover. If, as in the episode concerning the land dispute "Okonkwo's wives, and perhaps other women as well . . . noticed that the second *egwugwu* had the springy walk of Okonkwo" who was somehow absent from the group of elders "they kept [these thoughts] to themselves. The *egwugwu* with the springy walk was one of the dead fathers of the clan" (*TFA* X, 81) and there was no room for questioning.

The belief in magic among the people of Umuofia is counterbalanced by a practical work ethic. Okonkwo has therefore been able to rise to greatness in the clan through his own exertions. His successful striving echoes the proverb that "as a man danced so the drums were beaten for him" rather than an elder's sneering (and, as Achebe points out, inexact) remark that Okonkwo is one of those whose "palm kernels [have] been cracked for them by a benevolent spirit" (*TFA* IV, 24). In one of the few direct statements Achebe allows himself about Okonkwo's motivations we learn that

> Okonkwo ruled his household with a heavy hand. His wives, especially the youngest, lived in perpetual fear of his fiery temper, and so did his little children. Perhaps down in his heart Okonkwo was not a cruel man. But his whole life was dominated by fear, the fear of failure and of weakness. It was deeper and more intimate than the fear of evil and capricious gods and of magic, the fear of the forest, and of the forces of nature, malevolent, red in tooth and claw. Okonkwo's fear was greater than these. It was not external but lay deep within himself. It was the fear of himself, lest he should be found to resemble his father. . . . And so Okonkwo was ruled by one passion--to hate everything that his father Unoka had loved. One of those things was gentleness and another was idleness. (*TFA* II, 12-13).

Okonkwo's inner fear is the weakness which paradoxically motivates his show of manliness and strength, his strenuous exertions for material success and personal grandeur as well as his impatience with weakness, his intolerance of gentleness and his own irascible temper. It is, moreover, this weakness that makes him strike down his ward, Ikemefuna, during the lad's ordained but otherwise unexplained sacrificial slaying.

Ikemefuna is a Christ-figure with considerable importance in the design of *Things Fall Apart*. In many parallels with Christ's mission on earth, he symbolically foreshadows the advent of Christianity, just as the locust and leper symbolism presages the arrival of the white administration, although the two are virtually indistinguishable in the minds of the people. Chief among these parallels are the three years spent in a strange land where his good influence affects all those he comes in contact with, his guiltless slaughter by men of his own race, betrayal by a close ally who subsequently hangs himself, and the continued recounting of his sad story to this very day.[8]

The story of Ikemefuna is not only functional but is also an integral part of Okonkwo's mixed fortunes in the novel and of the conflict between the old religion and the new. A direct result is that Okonkwo's estrangement from his son Nwoye after Ikemefuna's murder ends in a complete breach in Part II. As far as the religious conflict is concerned, the fact that the story is as much realistic as symbolic suggests some kind of parallel between Christianity and the indigenous religion, although the preaching of the missionaries insists on the unique goodness and truth of the one as against the inherent wickedness and falsity of the other.

Okonkwo's first encounter with missionaries is during his exile. The account is one of the many gems of Achebe's narrative genius. The white man's "cultural ethnocentrism"[9] is evidenced when the white missionary, speaking through an interpreter whose dialect is different from that of Mbanta, declares that the people worship false gods which they must now abandon in favour of the one true God. The dialogue is worth reproducing:

> At this point an old man said he had a question. "Which is this god of yours," he asked, "the goddess of the earth, the god of the sky, Amadiora of the thunderbolt, or what?"
>
> The interpreter spoke to the white man and he immediately gave his answer. "All the gods you have named are not gods at all. They are gods of deceit who tell you to kill your fellows and destroy innocent children. There is only one true God and He has the earth, the sky, you and me and all of us."
>
> "If we leave our gods and follow your god," asked another man, "who will protect us from the anger of our neglected gods and ancestors?"
>
> "Your gods are not alive and cannot do you any harm," replied the white man. "They are pieces of wood and stone."
>
> When this was interpreted to the men of Mbanta they broke into derisive laughter. These men must be mad, they said to themselves. How else could they say that Ani and Amadiora were harmless? And Idemili and Ogwugwu too? And some of them began to go away.
>
> (*TFA* XVI, 132-3).

Obviously the missionary, having dismissed them out of hand, has not examined the villagers' beliefs to discover to what extent they are ingrained in the very pulse of their lives. As a result, to the villagers the white man and his religion are a supreme joke and they show their sense of humour--and of high drama--by offering the new religion that portion of the Evil Forest which no sane man would accept. The ready acceptance by the Christians only confirms the belief that they are insane, especially as the early converts are worthless men, or *efulefu*, and outcasts whose existence prompts the priestess of Agbala to describe the converts as "the excrement of the clan, and the new faith . . . a mad dog that had come to eat it up" (*TFA* XVI, 130).

Amid the general derision of the new religion, however, one person stands out who sees something in it to attract him. Nwoye, Okonkwo's son, although not impressed by the "mad logic of the trinity," which he does not understand, is held by the poetry of the religion which pours into his parched and questioning soul "like the drops of frozen rain melting on the dry palate of the panting earth" (*TFA* XVI, 134).

The clash between church and clan in Mbanta anticipates what Okonkwo experiences in Umuofia on his return. Until then, reports of what the white man has done in other communities, including setting up an administration where cases are judged and hanging a man who killed a missionary, seem far-fetched. As an outpost of the new religion, Mbanta's mission is manned by the white missionary's African interpreter, Mr. Kiaga, who is not lacking in zeal. The result is that when the over-zealous converts are ostracized and thus prevented from using the village stream, no immediate reprisal is forthcoming. The situation is ultimately resolved when Okoli, the convert who had supposedly killed a sacred python, is found dead. This death proves to the villagers that "the gods were still able to fight their own battles" so that their "clan saw no reason then for molesting the Christians"

(*TFA* XVIII, 147).

The situation in Umuofia is quite different. The fairy tale about the white man that the villagers heard in Mbanta becomes stark reality in Umuofia where the white administration has set up its regional headquarters. All the same, no clash with the new order is imminent because the white missionary, Mr. Brown, is a clever strategist whose policy is that "[e]verything was possible . . . but everything was not expedient" (*TFA* XXI, 161). Achebe illustrates this quality in one of many dialogues between the missionary and Akunna, one of the great men in Umuofia who has sent a son to the mission school while remaining unconverted himself. Speaking through an interpreter, the village elder points out that, like Christians, Umuofians believe in a supreme being who created heaven and earth. This supreme deity, Chukwu, also created the other gods. Against this Mr. Brown argues that all the other gods--among them Akunna's carved *ikenga*--are false gods made of sticks and stones. Akunna counters by saying that the tree from which his carved *ikenga* or household god is made, is a creation of Chukwu's and that all the gods are merely representatives or servants who act as intercessors between the individual and the supreme God. Using the white administration as a point of departure in the continuing apologetical dialectic in comparative religions they illustrate their positions in revealing ways. Akunna wins a concession from Mr. Brown that there is an earthly head of his church whom he represents in the region and then elaborates by citing the example of the District Commissioner as a representative of Mr. Brown's king in England. The argument leads to the following exchanges:

> "They have a queen," said the interpreter on his own account.
> "Your queen sends her messenger, the District Commissioner. He finds that he cannot do the work alone and so he appoints *kotma* to help him. It is the same with God, or Chukwu. He appoints the smaller gods to help Him because his work is too great for one person."
> "You should not think of him as a person," said Mr. Brown. "It is because you do so that you imagine He must need helpers. And the worst thing about it is that you give all the worship to the false gods you have created."
> "That is not so. We make sacrifices to the little gods, but when they fail and there is no one else to turn to we go to Chukwu. It is right to do so. We approach a great man through his servants. But when his servants fail to help us, then we go to the last source of hope. We appear to pay greater attention to the little gods but that is not so. We worry them more because we are afraid to worry their Master. Our fathers knew that Chukwu was the overlord and that is why many of them gave their children the name Chukwuka--'Chukwu is Supreme.'"
> "You said one interesting thing," said Mr. Brown. "You are afraid of Chukwu. In my religion Chukwu is a loving Father and need not be feared by those who do His will."
> "But we must fear Him when we are not doing His will," said Akunna. "And who is to tell His will? It is too great to be known."
> (*TFA* XXI, 162-3).

It is important to note that Mr. Brown quickly recovers from his attitude of superiority and begins to discuss the matter on equal terms. Such discussions make him realize that it is inexpedient to attempt the frontal attack that some of his fanatic adherents like Enoch and his equally fanatic antagonists like Okonkwo would have preferred.

Mr. Brown's intelligent approach is not shared by his successor, the Reverend James Smith, who is no man for compromises but sees only in terms of black and white. The conflict averted by Mr. Brown is precipitated anew by the militancy of the Reverend Mr. Smith and his flock. The unmasking of an *egwugwu* by the overzealous Enoch throws

Umuofia into confusion because the unmasking of a spirit is tantamount to killing the ancestor it represents.

This calculated action by a new Christian convert to belittle the gods of Umuofia gives an interesting dimension to Achebe's theme of cultural conflict. Achebe stresses time and again the fact that it is not customary for the adherents of traditional African religion to fight for their gods since the gods can defend themselves fully. By contrast, Christianity is a militant faith which is intolerant of any other persuasions. In *Things Fall Apart* its intolerance is reflected in the attitudes of the colonial administrators towards the indigenous peoples. In *Arrow of God* Achebe balances the conflict between the two cultures by depicting the frustrations and the internal struggles for power in both Ibo society and the colonial administration. In his poetry in general, and in *Hosties noires* in particular, Senghor depicts the conflict but in doctrinaire terms in which the black man is victim and the white man is villain. For Senghor, confrontation and conflict is only one stage in a process that will end in symbiosis. Soyinka rarely deals with racial conflict. When he does, as in "Telephone Conversation" or in the Immigrant poems, it is usually in order to point up the inherent absurdity or stupidity of a situation. Because of his total vision, too, his work includes an element of self-mockery. In his play, *The Road*, where a god in the state of possession is unmasked and subsequently abducted, the action is clearly undertaken in a desperate bid at self-preservation. Enoch's unmasking of the *egwugwu*, though it is in retaliation for the stroke of the cane the *egwugwu* gives him, has no such motive. Instead, it shows an outcast Umuofia villager subscribing to a militant Christianity and helping the new faith and government to undermine his own religion and society.

The destruction of the church as a reprisal for the unmasking of the *egwugwu* brings matters to a head between the white government and the traditional authority. The District Commisioner is away during the incident and on his return decides to set an example by his "punishment" of the six village elders whom he invites in friendship but submits to gross indignities in prison at the hands of the court messengers.

The outrage against the six men is of the kind that would have galvanized the old Umuofia into action a generation before these events. The people would have had no doubts about the support of their gods since the ensuing war could not have been called a war of blame. Unity then was Umuofia's distinguishing mark. Now, as Obierika points out to the non-plussed Okonkwo before the District Commissioner's disgraceful treatment of him and the others, the cohesion of the society has been destroyed by the white man's intervention:

> "How do you think we can fight when our own brothers have turned against us? The white man is very clever. He came quietly and peaceably with his religion. We were amused at his foolishness and allowed him to stay. Now he has won our brothers, and our clan can no longer act like one. He has put a knife on the things that held us together and we have fallen apart." (*TFA* XX, 160).

In order fully to understand Okonkwo's predicament at the end of the novel, it is necessary to appreciate how fundamental the changes effected by the white man on the pace and pattern of life in Umuofia have been. Under the former two-tiered system a man gained more and more respect because, as he grew older and drew nearer to the ancestors so he became wiser and, if he was industrious, he also gained importance by taking many titles which could only be had by persistent hard work. Okonkwo was in his prime when he went into exile and, despite his great success as a farmer, had been able to take only two of the four titles. Now after returning from exile he sees not only his seven years in Mbanta as wasted years, but, unless the new order is removed, he knows it will be impossible for him to realize his ambition, and that a whole life-time of burning desire and exhaustive effort will be reduced to ashes. As the popularly known "Roaring Flame," Okonkwo yearns not only for personal revenge for his maltreatment but also for a restoration of the old order under which alone he can succeed.

The pattern introduced by the white administration is not only dissimilar but unequal. The most powerful Africans in the system are strangers from distant Umuru who ape the white man in his arrogance and in his high-handedness. Furthermore, when the mission school is established it is not the respectable or influential people in the community who benefit from it, since they are unwilling or skeptical at the outset and merely send slaves or lazy children, but outcasts and the rag-tag who are promoted to positions of power. Thus the old order is completely upset. Finally, the system of long apprenticeship which gave power to the most enterprising and the most experienced is replaced, at least initially, by a crash-course programme in the mission school:

> Mr. Brown's school produced quick results. A few months in it were enough to make one a court messenger or even a court clerk. Those who stayed longer became teachers; and from Umuofia labourers went forth into the Lord's vineyard. New churches were established in the surrounding villages and a few schools with them. From the very beginning religion and education went hand in hand. (*TFA* XXI, 164).

Okonkwo's tragedy is that, like Mr. Green the white administrator of *No Longer at Ease* he is born out of his time. His whole life has been much too committed to the traditional structure of Umuofia, with its gradualism in terms of change and reform, to accept or accommodate a new radicalism that would reduce to nothing a whole career of ambitious effort. Looking back he sees all spoiled unless Umuofia can be urged by precept and example to follow its traditional course. His lone act is both a triumph and a failure. It proves his courage but it is a rash courage whose end does not justify the means and recalls, in a final stroke of tragic irony, the cutting down of a boy in an act of cowardice. The impulsive act puts an end to whatever can still be salvaged from his wrecked fortunes and precipitates the taking of his own life. His suicidal act not only denies him burial according to the customs he seeks to uphold but it also guarantees his annihilation from the spirit world as effectively as if all his sons had deserted the religion of their fathers and turned to worship an alien god. (Cp. *TFA* XVII, 139-40).

Achebe foreshadows Okonkwo's death, like the arrival of the white man, in a number of references to hanging and disaster in *Things Fall Apart*. One example is a poor farmer's suicidal hanging in the ruinous year when, helped by a wealthy farmer, Okonkwo launches his farming career: a change in the weather pattern results in a sorry harvest and the poor farmer is ruined. At the commencement of his seven-year exile in Mbanta his maternal uncle recounts a personal story of greater adversity than Okonkwo's; the uncle adds that he did not hang himself in spite of his grave troubles (*TFA* XIV, 122). Later during Okonkwo's exile there are rumours that a man who killed a missionary has been hanged by the newly established white administration. This kind of rumour is confirmed in Obierika's factual report of the hanging of another man by the new authorities. In this instance, the hanged man had killed the opposing claimant in a fight over land ownership. According to Obierika, the white man, ignorant of autochthonous land customs, awarded the land to the other side after one of their number had handily bribed the messengers and interpreter (*TFA* XX, 159-60). This last incident most readily foreshadows Okonkwo's own end. The distinction is that Okonkwo forestalls the inevitable hanging at the hands of the white man by taking his own life.

After the first dreadful harvest of Okonkwo's career his father, Unoka, comforts him with this pithy admonition:

> "Do not despair. I know you will not despair. You have a manly and a proud heart. A proud heart can survive a general failure because such a failure does not prick its pride. It is more difficult and more bitter when a man fails *alone*. (*TFA* III, 23).

At the time Okonkwo, with characteristic impatience, dismissed the advice as the rantings of an old man. His later fortunes, however, discourage such a ready dismissal of Unoka's words. It is noteworthy that Okonkwo himself raises, time and again, the issue of how much of a man's success is dependent on his efforts and how much on destiny or his *chi*. In the earlier part of the novel he has the appearance of being very much the master of his own fate. Subsequently, he either becomes the victim of capricious destiny or, from the moment when he inadvertently kills a clansman, suffers the consequences of his sacrilegious acts. Meanwhile, a new force is gradually establishing itself and Okonkwo, when challenged, takes on single-handed this new power which thwarts his own rise to grandeur. Because of his execution of the messenger, he fails in his bid to lead his fellow clansmen to avenge the clan's disgrace at the hand of the white man. Umuofia also fails in its own way. Its failure lies in the surrender of its political power to the usurping power not out of ignorance but on account of the realization that its struggle will be internally divisive and ultimately futile. Things therefore fall apart for Okonkwo and the clan; but while the clan may have the opportunity to regroup and to accommodate to change, Okonkwo is washed away by the tide of fate.[10]

The District Commissioner investigating the messenger's murder is unimpressed by Obierika's charge that his government drove Okonkwo to commit suicide. The novel ends with a passage that exposes the DC's racialist point of view in a brief but revealing portrait that well illustrates Achebe's consummate mastery of ironic detachment:

> The Commissioner went away, taking three or four of the soldiers with him. In the many years in which he had toiled to bring civilization to different parts of Africa he had learnt a number of things. One of them was that a District Commissioner must never attend to such undig-

> nified details as cutting down a hanged man from the tree. Such attention would give the natives a poor opinion of him. In the book which he planned to write he would stress that point. As he walked back to the court he thought about that book. Every day brought him some new material. The story of this man who had killed a messenger and hanged himself would make interesting reading. One could almost write a whole chapter on him. Perhaps not a whole chapter but a reasonable paragraph, at any rate. There was so much else to include, and one must be firm in cutting out details. He had already chosen the title of the book, after much thought: *The Pacification of the Primitive Tribes of the Lower Niger*. (*TFA* XXV, 187).

My comments elsewhere[11] on this passage are worth quoting here:

> This passage is tellingly ironic in its capturing of the Commissioner's pose in front of the so-called "natives." His insouciance in the face of Okonkwo's tragic end is in part dictated by his assumed racial superiority, in part by his preoccupation with the people of Africa not as human beings but as material for a book he is planning to write. Weighing the title of his projected book against our knowledge of the highly evolved society that Achebe depicts in Part One of *Things Fall Apart*, his own conduct as a judge who (we learn in an authorial comment) is known to "judge cases in ignorance," it is not difficult to understand the depth of insight that this expert on African customs will put into his masterpiece.

By concluding the novel with this speech of the Distric Commissioner, Achebe indicates that henceforth the point of view of the white administration will be dominant in the affairs of Umuofia. The DC's superficial knowledge and understanding of the man and the culture depicted by Achebe derives from his aloofness and from his cultural bias. The harmonious Ibo culture is consequently "primitive" and, to justify the colonial occupation, the sedate peoples of the Lower Niger become warring "tribes" which must be "pacified." As Achebe demonstrates, the same shortsightedness afflicts both administrators and missionaries in their reaction to traditional African culture.

The ambivalence of the new religion in *Things Fall Apart* is symbolized in the destructive and regenerative qualities of rain. In the story of the quarrel between Earth and Sky of Chapter VIII, the withholding of rain from the earth causes famine; but accidentally released by Vulture who wins a concession from Sky, it produces a flood.[12] Similarly, the education and many other gifts brought by the missionaries will improve the material well-being of the society. The poetry of the religion, too, can bring relief to a parched soul like Nwoye's. But the insidious element in the tactics used, especially the total rejection of a people's cultural heritage as worthless and depraved, can inflict severe wounds on their dignity and sense of history.

In tracing the history of his people Achebe goes back three generations to the period of the European "Scramble for Africa," but the influence of the white man was felt long before this in other parts of Iboland, notably at the time of the Slave Trade. Even in Umuofia the presence of guns, whether or not they are locally made, and the availability of gun-powder suggest an indirect contact with European civilization before the events described in the novel. Although the events in the novel centre on Okonkwo, they achieve wider significance in the light of Achebe's ambivalent portrayal and symbolic structure.

The structure of *Things Fall Apart* is interesting. Part I provides a detailed description of the variety and vitality of traditional life. A few incidents such as the description of a wrestling match and the search for Ezinma's *iyi-uwa* perhaps receive more attention than their importance in the story warrants, but they do add dimension to the picture of the man and the society held up to our view. The brisk second and third parts of the book are no less revealing, as events move inexorably to the final outcome. Perhaps most significantly the design of the novel, as it traces the course of Umuofia history from prosperity through conflict to disaster, serves as a metaphor for Achebe's study--in the subsequent novels--of his people's progress from culture to anarchy.

Chapter VI

Arrow of God: Masks in Masquerade

Things Fall Apart, as we have seen, depicts a sophisticated society of Ibos in an imaginary village grouping called Umuofia. The villagers are shown first in their harmonious rural setting and then in conflict with an alien power which destroys their unity. This picture of Ibo society is broadened when, in his third novel, *Arrow of God*, Achebe goes back to the traditional African scene. In this instance, another fictional group of villagers, the people of Umuaro, coexist with the new dispensation's small station in nearby Okperi. The juxtaposition of the two systems in this novel, coupled with a deeper analysis of the human attributes of the principal actors in each domain, bring to light aspects of the human dilemma of limited perspectives which were not shown in the first novel.

The early chapters of *Arrow of God* focus alternately on Ezeulu, the Chief Priest of Ulu, the major deity in Umuaro, and on Captain Winterbottom who, as District Officer, heads the colonial station in Okperi. In the latter half of the novel, the juxtaposition of events in the two camps within the same chapter points to the tangle between the old and the new.

A good deal of *Arrow of God* centres on Ezeulu as a tragic character. Through his actions and their total religious, political and social context, Achebe conducts an inquiry into the nature and dimensions of power. On the village level there is Ezeulu's traditional authority which entrusts to him the duty of announcing the arrival of each new moon and of naming the day for important religious celebrations, notably the Feast of the Pumpkin Leaves and the Festival of the New Yam, a duty that confers power or, at least, the semblance of power. We quickly discover as the narrative progresses that the priesthood of Ulu, the deity Ezeulu has been chosen to carry, was reportedly given to the weakest of the six villages to place a curb on the power of the office (*AG* II, 18, 33).[1] The circumstances leading to the gathering together of the six villages into a single unit many generations before contrast sharply with the division that now prevails:

> In the very distant past, when lizards were still few and far between, the six villages--Umuachala, Umunneora, Umuagu, Umuezeani, Umuogwugwu and Umuisiuzo--lived as different people, and each worshipped its own deity. Then the hired soldiers of Abam used to strike in the dead of night, set fire to houses and carry men, women and children into slavery. Things were so bad for the six villages that their leaders came together to save themselves. They hired a strong team of medicine-men to install a common deity for them. This deity which the fathers

> of the six villages made was called Ulu. Half of the medicine was buried at a place which became the Nkwo market and the other half thrown into the stream which became Mili Ulu. The six villages then took the name of Umuaro, and the priest of Ulu became their Chief Priest. From that day they were never again beaten by an enemy. (*AG* II, 17-18).

The oblique reference to the Slave Trade, unique in Achebe's fiction, affirms the concept of strength in unity. The indirect influence of the white man had originally brought the villages together. Now direct invasion by the white man is a new threat which has already crushed or altered indigenous religious and social structures elsewhere; and while Umuaro has so far resisted Christian proselytizing, the current internal strife that the disunity creates does not augur well for an eventual success against this new external force.

The dissension in Umuaro is between the villages of Umuachala, Ezeulu's village, and that of Nwaka, Umunneora. In the debate before the outbreak of hostilities between Umuaro and Okperi, Ezeulu speaks out against making war over the disputed land because, he claims, his father whom he succeeded as Ezeulu had told him that the land belonged to Okperi. It is Nwaka and his followers, however, who, insisting on the opposite view, carry the day. To punish the clan for supporting Nwaka in the ill-fated war that ensued Ezeulu testified against the claims of his people in the subsequent hearing arranged by Winterbottom.

Thus it is a bitter Ezeulu who, as the climax of a three-day vigil, surveys the limits of his power in the opening pages of *Arrow of God* as he roasts one of the sacred yams:

> Whenever Ezeulu considered the immensity of his power over the year and the crops and, therefore, over the people he wondered if it was real. It was true he named the day for the feast of the Pumpkin Leaves and for the New Yam feast; but he did not choose the day. He was merely a watchman. . . . No! the Chief Priest of Ulu was more than that, must be more than that. If he should refuse to name the day there would be no festival--no planting and no reaping. But could he refuse? No Chief Priest had ever refused. So it could not be done. He would not dare. (*AG* I, 3-4).

As early as this first episode in the novel Ezeulu is already considering testing the limits of his power.

On the other side is Captain Winterbottom who is under renewed pressure from headquarters to appoint new Warrant Chiefs for some village areas in his district despite his own belief, supported by experience with his appointee for Okperi, that the whole idea of creating chiefs where none existed before is both stupid and futile. It is through Winterbottom, who is a typical colonial administrator in his attitude towards "the natives" that we are able to set the time as 1922, the year he receives a disturbing memorandum which has been passed down to him from the Lieutenant Governor through the Resident and the Senior District Officer.

> "My purpose in these paragraphs is limited to impressing on all Political Officers working among tribes who lack Natural Rulers the vital necessity of developing without any further delay an effective system of 'indirect rule' based on native institutions.
>
> "To many colonial nations native administration means government by white men. You are all aware that H.M.G. considers this policy as mistaken. In place of the alternative of governing directly through Administrative Officers there is the other method of trying while we endeavour to purge the native system of its abuses to build a higher civilisation upon the soundly rooted native stock that had its foundation in the hearts and minds and thoughts of the people and therefore on which we can more easily build, moulding it and establishing it into lines consonant with modern ideas and higher standards, and yet all the time enlisting the real force of the spirit

of the people, instead of killing all that out and trying to start afresh. We must not destroy the African atmosphere, the African mind. the whole foundation of his race . . ." (*AG* V, 67-8).

It is interesting to note that in the generation since *Things Fall Apart* British administration policy has moved from the position where justice is dispensed just as it is done in England (cp. *TFA* XXIII, 175) to the point at which some recognition is given to indigenous institutions. This idea is however spurned by Winterbottom--privately of course--in his first reaction to the Lieutenant Governor's memorandum: "Words, words, words. Civilisation, African mind, African atmosphere. Has His Honour ever rescued a man buried alive up to his neck, with a piece of roast yam on his head to attract vultures?" The trouble with Winterbottom's comment is that he takes as the norm a single example of ill-treatment among Africans lifted out of its context. (That he has very few of such actual instances to quote is evidenced in his having cited the same example to his assistant, Tony Clarke.) A typical colonialist, Winterbottom believes in the innate depravity and backwardness of the African who, given the least opportunity, becomes a tyrant over his own people.

Winterbottom's attitude towards Africans is exemplified in our first encounter with him in Chapter Three. In contrast with the sense of harmony with nature (if not with humanity) which Ezeulu's first appearance suggests, Winterbottom is obviously in an alien environment where the throb of drums causes him to "wonder what unspeakable rites went on in the forests at night, or was it the heart-beat of the African darkness?" (*AG* III, 33-6). If one misses in this passage the echo of Conrad's Kurtz ("before the heart of darkness got him" to quote Obi Okonkwo, *NLE* XI, 106), one can certainly not miss it in the excerpt on THE CALL from the book Tony Clarke is just completing. It is the last chapter of *The Pacification of the Primitive Tribes of the Lower Niger* written by the first District Commissioner in Umuofia now given a name--George Allen. In stirring language the conclusion by Allen asserts, among other things, that "for those who can deal with men as others deal with material, who can grasp great situations, coax events, shape destinies and ride on the crest of the wave of time Nigeria is holding up her hands" (*AG* III, 39). Predictably, Tony Clarke, although he finds the book somewhat smug, is captivated by the burning eloquence of this passage, having no doubt the same ambition that Winterbottom must have had over a decade before when he first joined the service.

Accustomed to treating Africans like material and following in the best tradition of Allen, Winterbottom is understandably irritated by his assistant's charge of smugness. For Winterbottom believes that there is no redeeming virtue in the "native," until he is taught the only true culture--of Europe; hence his peevish criticism of the administration and its policy:

> "What do we British do? We flounder from one expedient to its opposite. We do not only promise to secure old savage tyrants on their thrones--or more likely filthy animal skins--we not only do that, but we now go out of our way to invent chiefs where there were none before. They make me sick." (*AG* III, 43).

Achebe endorses Winterbottom's objection to the hypocritical policy of indirect rule, of "divide and rule." But Winterbottom's own notions that the African has no "soundly rooted native stock" is, like the British administration's assumption that the absence of traditional rulers is a lack which must be filled, altogether mistaken. Witness his sneering remark about savage tyrants on filthy animal skins. The Lieutenant Governor's memorandum is in fact a rationale for introducing indirect rule into Eastern Nigeria after its success in the West and North; however, each of the last two regions had a previous history of natural rulers. Had the Lieutenant Governor known more about traditional rule among the Ibos, he would have realized that it had a firm foundation in an open democracy instead of in entrenched monarchical rule.

Although Winterbottom is privately contemptuous of "old fossils in Lagos," as the officer on the spot he is not a better judge of the mind of the African than his superiors. His glib reporting of the dispute between Umuaro and Okperi exposes his satisfaction with the role he played in its resolution. He earned the name of "Breaker of Guns" from this incident because, as the narrator comments, he "was not satisfied that he had stopped the war. He gathered all the guns in Umuaro and asked the soldiers to break them in the face of all, except three or four which he carried away." (*AG* II, 34).[2] Winterbottom's decision to award the disputed land to Okperi was later based on Ezeulu's testimony alone which he believed to be the truth because the priest was under the influence of a powerful taboo. Achebe juxtaposes Winterbottom's account of the conflict and its resolution with that of the narrator. The discrepancies between the two interpretations deflate Winterbottom's over-confident posture with reference to his handling of local affairs. His misplaced confidence about his own understanding of local problems is likely to cause complications when he appoints a Warrant Chief for Umuaro, where, unknown to him, there is a power struggle.

Winterbottom and Ezeulu operate on planes of power that are almost parallel; yet it would be a mistake to draw too many comparisons here, for the two men in positions of power are radically different in outlook. Unlike Okonkwo of *Things Fall Apart*, Ezeulu is sensibly flexible in his attitude to change and to experiment. After three years of deliberation on Winterbottom's suggestion that he send one of his sons to the mission school Ezeulu finally decides to do so. Calling his third son, Oduche, he speaks to him as an equal:

> "The world is changing," he had told him. "I do not like it. But I am like the bird Eneke-nti-oba. When his friends asked him why he was always on the wing he replied: 'Men of today have learnt to shoot without missing and so I have learnt to fly without perching.' I want one of my sons to join these people and be my eye there. If there is nothing in it you will come back. But if there is something there you will bring home my share. The world is like a Mask dancing. If you want to see it well you do not stand in one place. My spirit tells me that those who do not befriend the white man today will be saying *had we known* tomorrow." (*AG* IV, 55).[3]

Ezeulu is of course not simply accommodating change but investing in it. He is ambitious, and, seeking to explore and exploit the boundaries of power, he is ready to challenge forces in order to change his passive voice in Umuaro into a more active mode.

As Achebe characterizes him, Captain Winterbottom is a frustrated District Officer of more than ten years service. He has not even been promoted to Senior District Officer, although he has served for more years than many of his superiors. Although exasperated by directives from his seniors in the service, and angered by the tone of the Senior District Officer's note, he carries out his orders with enthusiasm, even after expressing skepticism to himself and to Clarke. Winterbottom's inflexibility derives from his fixed attitude *vis-à-vis* African culture, and may have been in part responsible for the fact that his junior in the service by three years is now the Senior District Officer. His lack of a broader perspective of political reality, fundamentally different from Ezeulu's, prevents him from exerting himself in a productive way that would consolidate his position in the administration. Winterbottom cannot, however, admit to himself or to his own assistants responsibility for his failure to advance in the colonial service:

> "Any fool can be promoted," Winterbottom always told himself and his assistants, "provided he does nothing but try. Those of us who have a job to do have no time to try." (*AG* V, 66).

Winterbottom is in reality a disgruntled officer with little imagination and no desire for innovation or accommodation, but his sincerity gives him a kind of integrity.

Ezeulu's own attempt to tap the resources of the white man is not without repercussions. The decision he makes as Chief Priest of Umuaro to send Oduche to the mission school is a bold step--even after three years of deliberation. In one of the few episodes directly involving the church at Umuaro, we are introduced to a situation that parallels the exit of Mr. Brown and the entrance of Mr. Smith, the two English missionaries in *Things Fall Apart*. Mr. Molokwu, the former African missionary teacher, was apparently a strategist like Mr. Brown, but his successor, Mr. Goodcountry, advocating confrontation like the Reverend Mr. Smith, states that the converts should not be afraid to kill the sacred python if they wish to be called Christians. In this instance, Mr. Goodcountry is opposed by a semi-educated carpenter, Moses Unachukwu. In his youth Unachukwu was conscripted to carry the loads of the soldiers sent on a punitive expedition against the people of Abame who had killed the white man, McDonald. In rebutting Mr. Goodcountry's exhortation Moses draws upon the myths of Umuaro to prove that the serpent is full of ill omen as well as to assert that the Bible gives no commandment for its slaying. The exchanges illustrate the impact of the new religion, the compelling desire of missionaries to break the hold of African beliefs, the tendency of many Africans to incorporate new beliefs into an existing religious pluralism and the simple factor of personality conflicts within the church. More than this, however, the exchange leads to Oduche's acceptance of Mr. Goodcountry's position and to the carpenter's own challenge to the youth to prove himself a man by killing his first python. Oduche's response to this taunt reverberates throughout Umuaro, dealing a blow to Ezeulu's image in the clan.

Having resolved to kill the bigger of the two sacred pythons which roam harmlessly around his mother's hut most of the time, Oduche's firmness fails him when the moment of execution arrives:

> He decided to take the smaller python. He pushed it down from the wall with his stick but could not bring himself to smash its head. Then he thought he heard people coming and had to act quickly. With lightning speed he picked it up as he had seen their neighbour, Anosi, do many times, and carried it into his sleeping-room. A new and exciting thought came to him then. He opened the box which Moses had built for him, took out his singlet and towel and locked the python inside. He felt a great relief within. The python would die for lack of air, and he would be responsible for its death without being guilty of killing it. In the ambivalence of his present life his act seemed to him a very happy compromise. (*AG* IV, 61).

This symbolic attempt by Oduche to resolve a practical dilemma is thwarted hy his father, Ezeulu, who would like to translate his largely symbolic office in Umuaro into one of real power. Confronting his son's box, which moves as the python struggles inside it, Ezeulu forces the box open in order to avoid the scandal "[t]hat he, Ezeulu, was afraid of whatever power his son had imprisoned in a box" for "[s]uch a story must never be told of the priest of Ulu" (*AG* IV, 54).

The discovery of the royal python in Oduche's box intensifies the dispute between Umuachala and Umunneora, for the python is sacred to Idemili, the principal deity of Nwaka's village. In unwittingly exposing the exhausted python to the profane gaze of Umuaro, Ezeulu makes himself vulnerable to attacks by other clansmen about the conduct of his affairs. When he first decided to send Oduche to the mission school, Ezeulu had dismissed Ugoye's objection that her son should be selected for sacrifice to the white man with the statement that people follow all kinds of strange ways in a great man's house, concluding "In such a place, whatever music you beat on your drum there is somebody who can dance to it." (*AG* IV, 56). This time, in more violent mood, he expels the messenger of Ezidemili, priest of Idemili and Nwaka's friend, who wants to know what he is planning to do about Oduche's sacrilege.

Like Ezeulu's subsequent chastisement of Umuaro during the Festival of the New Yam, Oduche's imprisonment of the sacred python is without precedent. The killing of the python is tantamount to the killing of a clansman, according to village lore, but the boy had only put the python in a box. Yet, while the act is expiated in the general cleansing that the Chief Priest undertakes ritualistically during the Feast of the Pumpkin Leaves, it does leave its mark on Ezeulu's reputation.

The discussion between Ezeulu and his only friend and confidant in Umuaro concerning the priest's intentions for Oduche reveals, in spite of Ezeulu's ill humour, some aspects of the character of the priesthood and of Ezeulu's own temperament. Akuebue who is responding to the fear expressed by Edogo, Ezeulu's eldest son, that their father wants to interfere in Ulu's exclusive duty to choose a successor, never refers to this issue in his debate with Ezeulu. In the course of their discussion we learn that Ezeulu is half man and half spirit--hence the paradox of his being Known and Unknowable. He has, he says, passed the stage of "dancing to receive presents" and so no one can "know the

Thing which beats the drum to which Ezeulu dances" (*AG* XII, 163). It is this unknown quantity in him that helps to make his actions, even when they seem inconsistent and on the verge of madness, largely inscrutable and incontestable.

In the light of succeeeding events in the novel perhaps the most important statement made by Ezeulu in the discussion is his answer to Akuebue's claim that he sent Oduche to the Christian school to please Winterbottom.

> "A disease that has never been seen before cannot be cured with everyday herbs. When we want to make a charm we look for the animal whose blood can match its power; if a chicken cannot do it we look for a goat or a ram; if that is not sufficient we send for a bull. But sometimes even a bull does not suffice, then we must look for a human. Do you think it is the sound of the death-cry gurgling through blood that we want to hear? No, my friend, we do it because we have reached the very end of things and we know that neither a cock nor a goat nor even a bull will do. And our fathers have told us that it may even happen to an unfortunate generation that they are pushed beyond the end of things, and their back is broken and hung over a fire. When this happens they may sacrifice their own blood. . . . That was why our ancestors when they were pushed beyond the end of things by the warriors of Abam sacrificed not a stranger but one of themselves and made the great medicine which they called Ulu." (*AG* XII, 165).

In the discussion Ezeulu returns to a reflection he has had at the time of the events described in *Arrow of God* when he contemplated the new religion which was becoming like a leper. At the time he had not known whether or not to withdraw his son from the mission, since the prophecy coming from many oracles that the white man would take over and rule the land suggested the expediency of keeping a representative in his camp. He tells Akuebue that the white man has been shown the way to their house and given a place to sit on. As if in support of

Ezeulu's own theory about the dependence of the white man on Africans for the subjugation of their own people, their conversation is interrupted by the arrival of Winterbottom's Chief Messenger who is sent to call Ezeulu to his office in Okperi. Disconcerted by the messenger's manner, Ezeulu refuses. Thus the two worlds which had been on separate orbits during the last five years are about to collide once again.

Achebe examines the various masks of culture and power that are displayed in *Arrow of God*. The analysis begins with Ezeulu who, while waiting for the appearance of the new moon in the novel's opening chapter, persists in trying to look too closely at the nature of his power. "What kind of power was it," he asks, "if everybody knew it would never be used?" (*AG* I, 4). After this dramatic opening we see how the Chief Priest strives to conserve and advance his power over his people. Ezeulu subsequently develops the strategy of masking his personal decisions and aims behind the divine will of Ulu. In consequence, he sees not only his testimony against his people during the dispute over land as an instrument of his god, but also his despatch of Oduche to the mission school, his detention in Okperi when he refuses to accept the proffered chieftaincy and the imposed delay in announcing the New Yam Festival. He views himself as Ulu's instrument or, as he puts it, "an arrow in the bow of his god" (*AG* XVI, 241). This tendency manifests itself as well in his dealings with the colonial station. After declaring that Winterbottom must come to his hut if he wants to see him because, customarily, the Chief Priest never leaves Umuaro, he is reminded in a sarcastic speech by Nwaka at the meeting he calls that since he and the white man are friends there is nothing odd in Winterbottom's invitation and Ezeulu has set a precedent for such a summons by going to Okperi to testify against the clan. The insolence of the Chief Messenger (the real cause of Ezeulu's refusal) is obscured by the sting in Nwaka's rhetorical display and Ezeulu, turning down all the offers to accompany him that are made, goes to Okperi alone. By the time Clarke gets round to offering the chieftaincy to him he has already retreated behind the mask of his god and he refuses, saying that "Ezeulu will not be anybody's chief, except Ulu" (*AG* XIV, 215). Always on the wing, like the bird Eneke-nti-oba, which challenged man, bird and beast (that is, the whole world) to a wrestling match, Ezeulu is willing to challenge all comers in the contiguous political, religious and even cross-cultural spheres, using his god and his office as weapons of attack and defence.[4]

Captain Winterbottom's directive to Clarke for dealing with Ezeulu contributes to the disaster that ensues. Before assigning him the chieftaincy Winterbottom wishes first of all to punish Ezeulu for his original refusal to come for the interview since, as he remarks before going into hospital, "I won't have my natives thinking they can treat the administration with contempt." (*AG* XIII, 184). Winterbottom is reluctant to surrender any part of the power he now has because he supports the French colonial policy which he sums up baldly: "This land has belonged to you because you have been strong enough to hold it. By the same token it now belongs to us. If you are not satisfied come out and fight us." (*AG* III, 43).[5]

Clarke's inexperience, his patronizing attitude and his discourtesy which reminds Ezeulu of the messenger's insolence are also factors that make the interview with the Chief Priest a disaster. Clarke is also preoccupied with his own subconscious preparation to assume control of the station in the event of Winterbottom's death. He unwittingly repeats the messenger's impudent demand for Ezeulu's name. He then follows this blunder by abruptly silencing Ezeulu's impatient interruption of his preliminary remarks about the severe punishment he will receive for a repetition of his disrespect for the government, and then proceeds to lecture him on the benefits of the administration. Clarke becomes increasingly angry at "the proud inattention of this fetish priest whom they were about to do a great favour by elevating him above his fellows and who, instead of gratitude, returned scorn" (*AG* XIV, 215). Ezeulu's astonishing rejection of the offer made by "this ill-mannered, young white pup" (*AG* XV, 216) draws from Clarke a response similar to that Winterbottom would have given:

> The expression on the priest's face did not change when the news was broken to him. He remained silent. Clarke knew it would take a little time for the proposal to strike him with its full weight.
>
> "Well, are you accepting the offer or not?" Clarke glowed with the I-know-this-will-knock-you-over feeling of a benefactor.
>
> "Tell the white man that Ezeulu will not be anybody's chief, except Ulu."
>
> "What!" shouted Clarke. "Is the fellow mad?"
>
> "I tink so sah," said the interpreter.
>
> "In that case he goes back to prison." Clarke was now really angry. What cheek! A witch-doctor making a fool of the British Administration in public!

Achebe's fine balancing of point of view and tone throughout the whole series of events that lead to this confrontation exposes anomalies that are often found in a colonial situation.

It is impossible to blame the miscarriage of Winterbottom's plan to install Ezeulu as Warrant Chief for Umuaro on any one person. All the principal participants in this pivotal event, within both the village structure and the colonial station, between which the half-educated messengers and policemen serve as bridges, and barriers, to communication, are constrained by their limited perspective and by their own attempts to exert power and influence. Achebe reveals the foibles and misconceptions of each in situational irony which puts in question all as parts of the struggle for power. The individuals with authority in the novel, from Winterbottom to Ezeulu and from the African missionaries to the court messengers, are too preoccupied with their own importance to make genuine and consistent efforts at mutual communication that is free of posturing.

In *Arrow of God* the question of power is always related to the presence of masks. When, for instance, in the opening pages of the novel, Ezeulu remonstrates with Edogo, the sculptor, for carving deities, his son gives the technical rejoinder that he is carving a mask and not a deity since the mask only becomes a deity after the necessary rites have been performed and a wearer assumes the mask.[6] But masks are not all of a kind. There are religious masks which perform specific dances, like the ancestral mask which Edogo goes to the sacred hut to carve for the festival of the Pumpkin Leaves; and Ezeulu himself, as the embodiment of Ulu during the ceremony, dances in front of the assembled villagers during the feast, re-enacting the First Coming of Ulu and the obstacles that the four Days put in his path (*AG* VII). Again, not all religious masks are dancing masks. One such example is the ancestral mask, Agaba, presented by Obika and his group, whose terrible countenance inspires terror among the crowd: "The face held power and terror; each exposed tooth was the size of a big man's thumb, the eyes were large sockets as big as a fist, two gnarled horns pointed upwards and inwards above its head nearly touching at the tip." (*AG* XVII, 249). This ancestral mask stands for "power and the aggressiveness of youth," in contrast with the personal mask that Nwaka, one of the richest men in Umuaro and Ezeulu's mortal enemy, wears himself at the Idemili festival. Nwaka's mask is called Ogalanya or Man of Riches and speaks a boastful language "which wins approval from a respectful crowd" (*AG* IV, 48).

Apart from these manifestations, there are the metaphorical allusions to the mask which enrich Achebe's language in *Arrow of God*. Perhaps the most important is the focal image from an Ibo proverb that Ezeulu uses in addressing Oduche on one occasion: "the world is like a Mask dancing. If you want to see it well you do not stand in one place" (*AG* IV, 55), an admonition that Edogo literally carries out when he surveys the mask he has made from different angles (*AG* XVII, 250-1). Other metaphorical allusions include Ezeulu's salute to

Umuaro like an enraged bull during the council of war before the skirmishes with Okperi begin; the silencing of his household after the fight between Oduche and Ojiugo with the warning "Let one of you open his mouth and make *fim* again and I will teach him that a man does not talk when masked spirits speak"(*AG* XII, 160); the comparison of Obika and his friend Ofoedu to "a pair of Night Masks caught abroad by daylight" (*AG* VII, 98); also, the remark about Winterbottom by one of the policemen sent to arrest Ezeulu--it is promptly amplified by Akuebue to include all the messengers--that "[t]he white man is the masked spirit of today" (*AG* XVII, 190).

The interplay of masks sparked off by Winterbottom's decision to appoint Ezeulu Warrant Chief does not end with the recovery from illness of the one, nor with the release from prison of the other. An ironic postscript to the whole affair is the receipt by Clarke, during Winterbottom's illness, of a despatch containing an adverse report on indirect rule by the Secretary of State for Native Affairs and a note from the Lieutenant Governor postponing the appointment of new Warrant Chiefs pending the Governor's final mandate; the report counsels tact, "so that the Administration did not confuse the minds of the natives or create the impression of indecision or lack of direction, as such an impression would do untold harm" (*AG* XV, 222-3). This sidelight is denied Ezeulu who returns to Umuaro after thirty-two days in prison, carrying to his people the fight that began with the colonial administration.

Ezeulu's withholding of the announcement of the New Yam Festival because three of the thirteen sacred yams still remain signals that he is going to test the practical application of his power over sowing and reaping and therefore over life and death in Umuaro. The conflict dramatized in the opening scene between the nominal and real poles of the Chief Priest's power will have to be resolved, especially considering Ezeulu's growing habit of making his god serve him instead of serving his god. He dismisses assistants who come to remind him that it is time to name the day of the festival, and then he politely but firmly rejects the proposal by one of the ten men of high title who are so desperately conciliatory that they have not included Nwaka, one of the very few men who have taken all four titles, in their delegation. The elders are eloquent but tactful; they intimate that Ulu is a redeemer not a destroyer and point out that Umuaro itself, not the white man who brought on the crisis, must find the solution; they hint, too, about customs which were removed when the people were under duress. Ezeulu is adamant, consenting only to divine the will of Ulu; but, as he announces later, the divination produces no mandate to change his original stand.

Ezeulu's rigid stand on the issue contradicts his hitherto prudent adjustment to change and his recognition of the value of sacrifice. He had accommodated to the actual and potential changes occasioned by the white man's presence by sending his son into the ranks of the new faith as the representative who would bring back his share if there was anything to be gained. He had also recalled the dire sacrifice that the ancestors had been obliged to make to bring the six villages together under Ulu, and in his own exposé of his reason for sending Oduche to the Christian mission school, he descants upon the theme of matching a sacrifice with the power of the charm. Why cannot something be done, then, to avert the crisis of the harvest seeing that, as he himself reflects, "the punishment was not for now alone but for all time"? (*AG* XIX, 274).

One reason is that Ezeulu has become so obsessed with power that it has warped his thinking. To put it another way, since Achebe allows for more than one interpretation, by probing the quintessence of power the Chief Priest has mingled the godhead and the figurehead in him, has indeed confused and interchanged the man and the spirit in him to become a man possessed. In this state subjective and objective roles become indistinguishable, and he can no longer shuttle freely between the human and divine modalities of his function. As he gravitates towards this state of ultimate possession, Ezeulu develops increasing intolerance of opposition and even of opinion about what he considers his exclusive prerogative; his behaviour lends credence to Nwaka's assertion that "he wants to be king, priest, diviner, all" (*AG* II, 33). In his prepossession with power Ezeulu loses sight of the fact that in his society not even a god (which as opposed to the Supreme Being may be created by the people) is immune. In this context it is Akuebue's repetition of a proverb that comes to mind: "no man however great can win judgement against a clan" (*AG* XII, 162).

Ezeulu sees himself as the arrow in the bow of his god, but ironically it is a rival religion that benefits from the disruption of the harvest. All the same, Achebe does not spare Christianity in its victory. An acquisitiveness not present in *Things Fall Apart* becomes evident here. Mr. Goodcountry, the African missionary, capitalizing on the discomfiture in Umuaro asks the people who are turning to the church as a means of avoiding disaster to bring not one, but as many yams as they can, and "not only yams, any crop whatsoever or live stock or money" (*AG* XVIII, 270). Personal rivalries within the church are at least temporarily suspended, for it is Moses Unachukwu who makes the *argumentum ad hominem* when the people protest that their custom is to give only one yam: "If Ulu who is a false god can eat one yam," Moses declares, "the living God who owns the whole world should be entitled to eat more than one." In any event, Ezeulu helps to bring about, perhaps more quickly, a change symbolized in the building of Wright's road to link Umuaro with other outposts in the district--a change that will render autochthonous institutions primarily ceremonial in the larger groupings that will result.

The skilful management of the various narrative levels and of the shifting perspectives in *Arrow of God* evinces Achebe's development as a writer. There is fine control of the conflicts in the novel, full exploitation of the limitations of point of view, situational and cultural misconceptions in the structural and thematic development.

There is also a wealth of detail and incident which adds to the novel's rich texture. Some of the longer episodes with a tenuous hold on the main narrative lend themselves, however, to the charge of so-called anthropological detail: certainly, they do tend to slow down the pace of the story, which becomes--to recall an image used with reference to the ivory-laden feet of Nwaka's five wives--"perforce slow and deliberate, like the walk of an Ijele mask lifting and lowering each foot with weighty ceremony" (*AG* VII, 84).

Achebe portrays the past in his society with candour and objectivity. It is a moot point whether *Arrow of God* gives, overall, a greater depth to the picture first given in *Things Fall Apart*. There is no doubt a more conscious attempt to analyze the psychological motivations of the leading character, Ezeulu, and a nice balancing of the evidence at the end which allows interpretation of his madness through heredity, psychology or supernaturalism. The focus given the white administration and particularly Winterbottom is not only indicative of Achebe's insight into the other side of the picture in the colonial situation, but the characterization of the District Officer is, though not flattering, certainly not flat, for we do get occasional glimpses into his humanity.[7] In the end, it is the human condition that the novelist sets out to explore, a condition that brings two people from alien worlds together for a brief moment and then separates them again each to a different kind of oblivion.

Achebe pays full tribute to the past in *Things Fall Apart* and

Arrow of God. The colonial situation as he sees it and portrays it is a tragic one and the protagonists he depicts are men with dignity and respect who are caught up in a web of fate that their character, whether in its inflexibility of will, set purpose or ambition, hurries on. The recreation of this past is made particularly for the young people in his society who have been cut off from this heritage though its message speaks to all men everywhere. Achebe's main intention is contained in an Ibo proverb which first finds expression in his writing in *Arrow of God.* It is that "a man who does not know where rain started to beat him cannot know where he dried his body" (*AG* XII, 163).[8] By telling his people about their past the novelist can help them better to understand their present about which he writes in *No Longer at Ease* and in *A Man of the People.*

Chapter VII

No Longer at Ease: Obi Okonkwo as Human Mask

Obi Okonkwo, the central character of *No Longer at Ease*, goes to study in England and after about four years he returns to Nigeria with a degree in English. As he travels home to Umuofia for a brief visit while waiting for the result of an interview for a position in the Senior Civil Service, he suddenly focuses his attention on the song the traders in the mammy wagon are singing and tries to translate the refrain into English for the first time, with this result:

> "An in-law went to see his in-law
> Oyiemu-o
> His in-law seized him and killed him
> Oyiemu-o
> Bring a canoe, bring a paddle
> Oyiemu-o
> The paddle speaks English
> Oyiemu-o." (*NLE* V, 46).

Analysis follows translation of the song which Obi finds surrounded by a wealth of association even though it is a mediocre song:

> On the face of it there was no kind of logic or meaning in the song. But as Obi turned it round and round in his mind, he was struck by the wealth of association that even such a mediocre song could have. First of all it was unheard of for a man to seize his in-law and kill him. To the Ibo mind it was the height of treachery. Did not the elders say that a man's in-law was his *chi*, his personal god? Set against this was another great betrayal; a paddle that begins suddenly to talk in a language which its master, the fisherman, does not understand. In short then, thought Obi, the burden of the song was "the world turned upside down." (*NLE* V, 46).

The theme of the song according to this inductive explication--the world turned upside down--is largely applicable to Achebe's work as a whole. Although it is the second of Achebe's four novels in order of writing, *No Longer at Ease* represents the third stage of the progressive topsy-turvydom that had its seed-time in the events explored in *Things Fall Apart* (1958); *Arrow of God* (1964), as the second phase of this decline, reveals the flourishing of an endemic dissension. The contagion soon ends, like that of its historical forerunner, in large-scale catastrophe; and the bitter fruit that Obi Okonkwo's bribe-taking yields in *No Longer at Ease* is only a foretaste of the full crop, reaped through corruption and cynicism, in *A Man of the People* which depicts a society where the forces of anarchy now hold sway.

Umuofia society in *Things Fall Apart* is a microcosm of Ibo society and a paradigm of the relative order of African societies generally before the insidious and destructive forces of European colonialism and culture come into play. The disintegration of the old way of life is both logical and inevitable, for it is in the nature of things that empires rise and fall, that values change with changing times. Achebe accepts this mutability as an ineluctable factor in human civilization and progress; all the same he views as tragic both the manner and method of the passing of a way of life that had poetry, beauty and a harmony with nature.[1] For, as necessary for human progress as change is, the gains that it produces are never without some sense of loss. The need for modifying or restructuring a leisurely traditional society to meet the compelling demands of a highly structured and fast-paced technological culture is incontestable. Must such change, however, involve the sacrifice of a whole pattern of life including the best in a community-oriented society where the individual had dignity and a strong moral duty to set the welfare of the community above his own? Will it not lead to chaos when an individual born into the old and then thrust into the new proves unequal to the task of accommodating two contradictory codes of ethical values within him?

Obi Okonkwo's exegesis of the traders' song of the in-law raises some questions that are central to Achebe's portrayal of the conflict between an Ibo world view and a European philosophy, which resulted in the many reciprocal misconceptions that are exposed in his novels of the past. Obi is himself two removes from his past. First, he was born into a Christian home, for his father had turned away from traditional religion to Christianity in his search for a meaning in life that was denied him when his own father took an active part in the ritual slaying of the young Nwoye's household companion, Ikemefuna. Second, during his years in England he has become estranged from the adopted religion of his father and when he comes back home to his strictly religious family he wonders, though he knows he cannot do it, "What would happen if I stood up and said to him: 'Father, I no longer believe in your God'" (*NLE* VI, 56). Obi's personal dilemma is that he has not been deeply committed to anything in his twenty-six years of life, and his inability to relate positively except intellectually to the complex realities of living in mid twentieth-century Nigeria makes him a somewhat naive and vacillating character, in comparison with his grandfather, Ogbuefi Okonkwo, and with Ezeulu, the dignified and single-minded representatives of the past.

Obi Okonkwo is a child of two worlds, the African and the European.[2] Driving from the Lagos mainland to his flat in Ikoyi, a suburb which was once an exclusive European reserve, Obi reflects that it is "like going from a bazaar to a funeral." The "two cities in one always reminded him of twin kernels separated by a thin wall in a palm-nut shell. Sometimes one kernel was shiny-black and alive, the other powdery-white and dead." (*NLE* II, 18). If this image, one that suggests the doctrine of Negritude,[3] were fairly representative of Obi's attitude to the situation in Nigeria at the time, he would at least have been able to identify in some measure with a particular mood or movement regardless of its merits. But he can also react with disdain in the language and manner of a recently acquired heritage when the mammy wagon driver pays a policeman a bribe of ten shillings to defend himself against possible charges:

> "What an Augean stable!" he muttered to himself. "Where does one begin? With the masses? Educate the masses?" He shook his head. "Not a

> chance there. It would take centuries. A handful of men at the top. Or even one man with vision--an enlightened dictator. People are scared of the word nowadays. But what kind of democracy can exist side by side with so much corruption and ignorance? Perhaps a half-way house--a sort of compromise." (*NLE* V, 43-4).

Obi is "an only palm-fruit" whose chances of yielding much fruit are jeopardized because the twin kernels are each only half-alive. The thin wall between the two energies does not make for a healthy cross-fertilization, either by osmosis or diffusion, for they are not adapted to compromise or symbiosis. His idealism, characterized by the statement "Give me a place to stand and I shall move the earth," is based on superficial reality for "such a place does not exist" as Achebe points out: "We all have to stand on the earth itself and go with her at her pace." (*NLE* XIX, 167). Obi's impatience with corrupt practices in Nigeria stems from the fast crumbling nostalgic vision he had in London of a romantic, pastoral landscape in a mother country peopled with brave, peaceful and noble men working in unison to build a nation (cp. *NLE* II, 17 and XVI, 151). Although well-meaning, his attitude shows little attempt on his part to understand the underlying motivations of such practices. Obi is, in fact, an individual so thoroughly desensitized that he cannot feel deeply and protractedly or act competently about any of the crises in his life: the practical implications of marrying an *osu*, Clara's exit from his life after aborting his baby with his active co-operation, his mother's death or his financial problems. In the first of these crises he defends himself against his father's objections by casting himself in the role of a pioneer who has seen the light of the Gospel. To his defence his father replies: "I went through fire to become a Christian. Because I suffered I understand Christianity--more than you will ever do" (*NLE* XIV, 138). At the time, there was no genuine feeling of anger in him for his conviction about the justness of his position "came from the periphery, and not the centre, like the jerk in the leg of a dead frog when a current is applied to it" (*NLE* XIV, 137). This reaction parallels his transitory sense of grief over the death of his mother, since "[t]he death of a mother is not like a palm tree bearing fruit at the end of its leaf, no matter how much we want to make it so" (*NLE* XIX, 167).

The crisis that finally leads to his ruin is his financial situation. About money Obi is singularly inept. Owing to the lack of control over his personal affairs, he descends from his lofty denunciation of bribery to a base acceptance of it; however, he clings to a warped sense of morality in his capacity as Secretary to the Scholarship Board since he takes offers only from candidates who had minimum requirements.[4] His continuance of the practice after the financial problems which gave rise to his lapse under pressure are solved is indicative of his moral weakness.

The tragedy of Obi Okonkwo partly derives from his inability to reconcile--he is sometimes unable even to recognize--the conflicting demands of his people and of his new status as a senior civil servant. On the one hand there are his clan loyalties. His obligations to his immediate family apart, he is financially indebted to the Umuofia

Progressive Union whose members had taxed themselves mercilessly to raise the money for his scholarship loan to go to England so that he would study law and come back to handle their land cases. At a reception in his honour soon after his arrival from England on the MV *Sassa*, the sentiment of the Union membership is expressed by the secretary in his welcome address to Obi. Quoting an Ibo saying that "ours is ours, but mine is mine" he declares "Every town and village struggles at this momentous epoch in our political evolution to possess that of which it can say: 'This is mine.' We are happy that today we have such an invaluable possession in the person of our illustrious son and guest of honour." (*NLE* IV, 32). At the reception in Umuofia, Obi's home village, Iguedo, is proudly cited as "the first in all the nine villages to send our son to the white man's land" (*NLE* V, 54). In the face of his father's objection that dead men do not return Obi is declared his grandfather "Ogbuefi Okonkwo come back . . . *kpom-kwem*, exact, perfect" (*NLE* V, 53) and associated with the great men of the past--Okonkwo, Ezeulu, Obierika, Okolo, Nwosu. Obi's heart glows with pride as the legatee of such a rich heritage, but he becomes uneasy when the down-to-earth members of the Lagos branch of the Union begin to hint about using his influence to find jobs for displaced members like Joshua Udo who was fired from his job as messenger for sleeping on duty--a punishment for failing to complete the payment of the ten-pound bribe he had promised the chief clerk on his employment.

On the other hand, Obi's exposure to Western education has developed in him an individualism which often expresses itself in purely self-centred actions. The first instance of this self-centred action in his dealings with the Umuofia Progressive Union is his decision to read English for his degree rather than law for which the "scholarship" was awarded. Obi impulsively chooses this field which he is later ashamed of whenever, in the course of his years in England, his nostalgia for Umuofia becomes overpowering. Then, for the formal reception given in his honour by the Union he commits one *faux pas* after another: because of the heat he appears in short sleeves rather than *agbada* or European suit; and instead of speaking the resounding "been-to" English that his kinsmen expect and admire (if they do not understand), in the language of their secretary, Obi speaks "is" and "was."

Obi's failure to live up to the image of one who has been to England is a product of his insensitivity *vis-à-vis* the Union. His self-will, exhibited in his childhood days by the outrage of writing a letter to Hitler, is further deepened by his double alienation--from the clan and from the Christian ways of his father--which makes him identify more readily with an intensely secularized European sensibility, superimposed on a dimly recognized traditional African base. Since most of the actions in which we see him engaged in the course of the novel stem from the superficial self and not the core of his being, they tend to be dictated by purely selfish motives. A case in point is his decision to marry Clara. He tells his friend Joseph that she is *osu* and then soon after casually announces their engagement. Joseph is bitter and, in a bid to get his friend to change his mind, reveals the fact to the chairman of the Union and then writes to Obi's family about it. For his first attendance at the regular meeting of the Union Obi (again in casual wear) arrives in his new car with Joseph and then makes some amends for the "is" and "was" speech he had given earlier by delivering a carefully rehearsed speech which he begins in Ibo but during the course of which he gradually shifts to English. He creates a good impression on his audience, citing Ibo proverbs on the dangers of living apart and on welcoming a man who has come from a long journey. His expression of thanks for their wonderful welcome leads to the main purpose behind his prepared address--the request for a four-month delay before he begins to pay back his loan. The president promptly accepts Obi's request for which he gains general approval, but uses the opportunity to lecture Obi on his private affairs. He tells him:

> "Lagos is a bad place for a young man. If you follow its sweetness, you will perish. . . . We cannot afford bad ways . . . We are pioneers building up our families and our town. And those who build must deny ourselves many pleasures. . . . You may ask why I am saying all this. I have heard that you are moving around with a girl of doubtful ancestry, and even thinking of marrying her. . . ." (*NLE* VIII, 82-3).

Obi leaps to his feet trembling and is rendered almost speechless with fury by this last meddling statement; his first stuttering words are characteristically British as the unruffled president calmly tells him to sit down: "'Sit down, my foot!' Obi shouted in English. 'This is preposterous! I could take you to court for that . . . for that . . . for that. . . .'" (*NLE* VIII, 83).

All in all, Obi's storming out of the meeting in blind rage on the strength of this provocation constitutes an over-reaction, given the attempts by many of the members to pacify him and the significance of the issue itself in its context. If he had had more control over himself and the situation, he would have responded in a less melodramatic way, perhaps by telling the president that he would not accept the deferment if it meant submitting his personal affairs to Union scrutiny or, by reminding him, as he does his father later on, that as a Christian and a pioneer he gives no weight to such considerations about ancestry. But Obi does not hold the Union in very high esteem and his pique, arising from wounded pride, does not allow him to think clearly at the time. He subsequently makes his peace with his kinsmen but refuses the four months reprieve with the lie that his financial situation has improved, and he keeps Joseph at a distance for his role in the dispute.

Had Obi been a little more circumspect, this crisis and many of the others might have been averted or might at least have assumed a diminished importance. For instance, when he first learns that Clara is *osu* and that Obi is determined to marry her, Joseph, speaking in English, retorts "'You know book, but this is no matter for book. Do you know what an *osu* is? But how can you know?' In that short question he said in effect that Obi's mission-house upbringing and European education had made him a stranger in his own country--the most painful thing one could say to Obi." (*NLE* VII, 71-2). In the light of subsequent events this implicit charge of estrangement is nothing but the painful truth. Spurred by Joseph's early show of opposition to his marriage plans, the very next day Obi calls on Clara and announces that they are going to buy an engagement ring, waving aside the objection she begins to make that she has not yet consented to the marriage. He plans to use his engagement to Clara as a *fait accompli* but this ruse does not get past Joseph and it will certainly not impress either the Union or his own parents. Also, put to the supreme test when Clara becomes pregnant by him, he lacks the guts to defy the grossly underestimated opposition to his wilful determination to marry the girl. Joseph's query about his standing with the Umuofia Progressive Union if he pursues his intention to marry Clara, "What sort of encouragement will you give to the poor men and women who collected the money?" meets with a sharp rejoinder, "It was only a loan, remember. I shall pay it all back to the last anini." (*NLE* VII, 75). It is a rejoinder that underlines the difference in attitude between the Union membership and their favoured son. For the Union, the education of Obi is a sober "investment which must yield heavy dividends" (*NLE* IV, 32). Witness their design to have him qualify as a lawyer to take up their land cases. Obi, however, implicitly rejects any obligations to his Union beyond that of repaying the interest-free loan and from the very first, by reading English, he proves that he has no share in his kinsmen's aspirations. He wants to be associated with the illustrious men of his village but without making any personal sacrifices or commitments to his present-day clansmen at large.

Obi no doubt deserves some autonomy in his life, but evinces little foresight or deep thinking in his choice of goals or the exercise of his free will. In an alarming sense, his actions are reminiscent of his boyhood when he used to start his cold bath slowly, from the fringes--arms, legs and head--and finish, in a sudden swing of the bucket, with his back. His toying around with the idea of marriage and then his plunging headlong into an engagement in the hope that everything will work out to his advantage is a further illustration of his characteristic approach to problem solving. Although he considers his affair with Clara as different from those skirmishes where "one half of Obi might kiss a girl and murmur: 'I love you,' but the other half would say: 'Don't be silly'" (*NLE* VII, 70), their feelings for each other seem more mawkish than profound, and their conversations with and reactions to each other are absurdly romantic and histrionic. Given this character's diffidence and naïveté it is not difficult to understand his somewhat facile notions about bribery and corruption in Nigeria.

A steadfast dependence on theory rather than practice is at the heart of Obi's dislocation in Lagos society, especially with reference to the central issue of his corruption in the novel. As a student in England he read a paper to the Nigerian Students' Union in London in which he asserted that corruption in Nigeria's public service would remain "until the old Africans at the top were replaced by young men from the universities" (*NLE* V, 38). This theory remains intact when he returns. It recurs in subsequent debates on corruption which he has, especially with Christopher, the economist friend who is ruthlessly pragmatic in all his affairs. The following early exchange well depicts their different attitudes:

> "The Civil Service is corrupt because of these so-called experienced men at the top," said Obi.
>
> "You don't believe in experience? You think that a chap straight from university should be made a permanent secretary?"
>
> "I didn't say *straight* from the university, but even that would be better than filling our top posts with old men who have no intellectual foundations to support their experience."
>
> "What about the Land Officer jailed last year? *He* is straight from the university."
>
> "He is an exception," said Obi. "But take one of these old men. He probably left school thirty years ago in Standard Six. He has worked steadily to the top through bribery--an ordeal by bribery. To him the bribe is natural. He gave it and he expects it. Our people say that if you pay homage to the man on top, others will pay homage to you when it is your turn to be on top. Well, that is what the old men say."
>
> "What do the young men say, if I may ask?"
>
> "To most of them bribery is no problem. They come straight to the top without bribing anyone. It's not that they're necessarily better than others, it's simply that they can afford to be virtuous. But even that kind of virtue can become a habit." (*NLE* II, 20).

Obi pursues an interesting line of reasoning in this dialogue. Old men in the service are corrupt because they developed the "habit" through a life-long career of gradual progression in which it is natural to give and receive; by the same token young men can develop a habit of not accepting by not having been obliged to give.

Another fact that his pronouncements bring to light is his poor opinion of those who have risen through the ranks. The sleeping African Board member at the Public Service Commission interview who asks Obi if he wants a job in the Civil Service in order to take bribes and Mr. Omo (Mr. Green's obsequious Administrative Assistant) are examples of Obi's old Africans. Joseph, Obi's former classmate, who left school in Standard Six for financial reasons and is now a clerk at the Survey Department would be barred from the Senior Civil Service according to Obi's plan. Joseph rebukes Obi for telling the African Board member that his unique question on bribery is not a useful one by reminding him that book learning is not everything. He responds to Obi who calls his rebuke an example of "colonial mentality" by saying, "You know more book than I, but I am older and wiser. And I can tell you that a man does not challenge his *chi* to a wrestling match." (*NLE* V, 40). It is the first of many such remarks which include the traders' attack on "too know" young men and the Umuofia Progressive Union President's comment, during the meeting which ends in fiasco, that "book learning stands by itself and experience stands by itself" (*NLE* VIII, 82).

The cleavage between knowledge and experience as between theory and practice is central to the development of *No Longer at Ease*. Unlike Christopher, Obi seems to think that they "have reached the stage where [they] can ignore all . . . customs" (*NLE* XV, 144)--including a system that has so far relied heavily on experience--by virtue of an enlightened education that trains men to fill top positions directly. In reality, the ideal situation is one that attempts to combine and co-ordinate both theory and practice. Except for Obi, the Africans in the novel are largely deferential towards education when they do not possess it[5] and manage dexterously the business of shifting back and forth between the old and the new. Obi, despising practical experience, cannot even manipulate successfully the simple mechanism of bribe-taking. His decline is, in the event, a product of his temperamental nature and, to a less palpable extent, the result of changing factors in Nigerian life.

In the final chapters of *Things Fall Apart* there is increasing resentment among fastidious Umuofians against the white man for overturning the values of Umuofia in the course of introducing his own. Superior strategy and superior force win. But in the next generation, as yet unexploited complexities are laid bare in the power structure examined in *Arrow of God* and it is the African-run Christian mission midway between the clan and the British political administration that takes the cake (or more exactly the yam) when Ezeulu's refusal to accept the offer of chieftaincy ultimately brings about the crisis over the harvest and the New Yam Festival. An episode recalled in *No Longer at Ease* in which Obi's mother as the wife of catechist Isaac Nwoye Okonkwo decapitates a meddlesome ram sacred to Udo, a local deity, is, in the issue, a commentary on the devaluation of Ibo custom and tradition; it also leads to the recall of another no less revealing incident which serves as a link between *Arrow of God*, where there is a similar occurrence, and *No Longer at Ease*. In response to Mrs. Okonkwo's action

> There were angry threats from village elders. The women for a time refused to buy from her or sell to her in the market. But so successful had been the emasculation of the clan by the white man's religion and government that the matter soon died down. Fifteen years before this incident the men of Aninta had gone to war with their neighbours and reduced them to submission. Then the white man's government had stepped in and ordered the surrender of all firearms in Aninta. When they had all been collected, they were publicly broken by soldiers. There is an age grade in Aninta today called the Age Group of the Breaking of the Guns. They are children born in that year.
>
> (*NLE* XIX, 166).[6]

The young university graduates like Obi and Christopher who are assured key posts in the Civil Service enjoy this boon on account of the new wave of Africanization that is taking place in the wake of Nigeria's march to independence. In the process a new power shift is also under way. In the schema we have for Umuofia as an archetypal African society there is a steadily falling graph from a high peak after the initial upset of exacting traditional norms of success and power and the substitution by a few months study in the white man's school for the relatively powerful jobs of court messenger and court clerk (*TFA* XXI, 166). By contrast, the graph of Nigeria under British rule has an even curve upwards as the pacification process gets under way. It levels off about the period of Indirect Rule; as independence approaches there is a somewhat sudden fall in the mildly fluctuating graph. Ogbuefi Okonkwo, Ezeulu and Obi Okonkwo are symbols of the first. Obi also symbolizes the end of the period of transition, but it is Mr. Green, his head of department and a forerunner of Captain Winterbottom (that is, in order of writing and not of historical representation), who symbolizes this phase.

Mr. Green is a somewhat caricatured colonialist. He gives Obi a rather frosty welcome on his first day in the Establishment, muttering the hope "that Obi would enjoy his work; one if he wasn't bone-lazy, and two if he was prepared to use his loaf" (*NLE* VII, 64)--assuming he had one; soon after he berates the new recruit for not saying "sir" to him. Purporting to understand the reason for Obi's corrupt practices --and those of all Africans for that matter--at the end of the trial he explains Obi's action by what he believes to be the facts: "The fact [is] that over countless centuries the African has been the victim of the worst climate in the world and of every imaginable disease. Hardly his fault. But he has been sapped mentally and physically. We have brought him Western education. But what use is it to him?" (*NLE* I, 3). Obi's own portrait of Mr. Green includes sketches on his blotting pad. Green's English secretary, Miss Tomlinson, however reveals that Green pays school fees for his steward's sons. Obi, who is now on friendly terms with the lady, in turn reports that Green had torn up a query from the Administrative Assistant which would have led to the dismissal of the messenger Charles for sleeping on duty. Charles was being punished by the Assistant for not completing payment of the bribe that earned him the job. The incident echoes the request to the Umuofia Progressive Union for a loan made by a messenger temporarily out of work. The president, adopting English as the "legal" language, approves the loan (intended as a bribe to a public official) "for the express purpose of seeking re-engagement" (*NLE* VII, 79). As someone who works extremely hard for a country he does not believe in, the paradox of Mr. Green's situation is puzzling to Obi. But suddenly the mist clears. Mr. Green loves a special kind of Africa which he can control, for he must have been fired originally by the lofty ideal "to bring light to the heart of darkness, to tribal head-hunters performing weird ceremonies and unspeakable rites." But he is thwarted by the outcome:

> when he arrived, Africa played him false. Where was his beloved bush full of human sacrifice? There was St George horsed and caparisoned, but where was the dragon? In 1900 Mr Green might have ranked

among the great missionaries; in 1935 he would have made do with slapping headmasters in the presence of their pupils; but in 1957 he could only curse and swear." (*NLE* XI, 106).

Obi's analysis of Mr. Green's predicament further emphasizes the theme of a "world turned upside down." Obi remembers his Conrad and Kurtz's self-incriminating postscript: "Exterminate all the brutes." Though the beginning and end of Kurtz and Green are similar Obi however concedes that the analogy is not all that close: "Kurtz had succumbed to the darkness, Green to the incipient dawn." In any case Obi's exercise in analysis indicates the reshuffling of power as we come full circle. At the end of *Things Fall Apart* Umuofia's first British District Commissioner, George Allen, contemplates the writing of "a reasonable paragraph at least" (*TFA* XXV, 187) about Okonkwo in his book on Nigeria. Now the first native son of Umuofia to be educated in the white man's country plans to write about the tragedy of the Greens, the Winterbottoms and the Allens of this century.

The idea of an inverted order is present in the structure of *No Longer at Ease* for which the beginning is also the end. Obi Okonkwo is on trial for bribe-taking and no one in the context of the book, not even Mr. Green "in spite of his certitude" (*NLE* XIX, 170) seems really to comprehend, as the judge says in his summing up, "how a young man of your education and brilliant promise could have done this" (*NLE* I, 2). By supplying the clues to Obi's fortunes and misfortunes, Achebe makes available to the reader those insights that are denied the principal witnesses in the actual plot. The judge does not comprehend. Mr. Green thinks Obi's corruption is in keeping with the traits of the African. The members of Obi's Union put it down to inexperience in the natural art of bribe-taking, deploring the fact that Obi will go to jail for a paltry twenty pounds and not a juicy toad of a sum.

The fact that Obi has nothing in him to challenge honestly the deep-seated feelings of others about his whimsical and objectionable course of action leaves the reader little to identify with positively about his plight, considered in the absolute. We seem to be required to take Obi a trifle more seriously than he deserves. In one of his facile theories, he tries to set the conventional theory of tragedy on its head. Graham Greene's *The Heart of the Matter*, according to him, is almost ruined by the "happy ending" where the hero, Scobie, commits suicide. "Real tragedy is never resolved," he declares. "It goes on hopelessly for ever. Conventional tragedy is too easy. The hero dies and we feel a purging of the emotions. A real tragedy takes place in a corner, in an untidy spot, to quote W. H. Auden." (*NLE* V, 39). In Obi's case the only untidy spot is the stain the crime and its punishment will leave on him for the rest of his life. Beyond him his tragedy will have an impact on his family and the Union--until the members can recover sufficiently to make a wiser investment in educating their promising sons. But the reader is hard put to it to feel sympathy for Obi because his lack of a central core leaves little to identify with in the form of aspirations or reversals.

What, then, are the reasons behind the creation of such a pusillanimous character? An answer to this question may be sought in psychology. It is curious that the career of Obi and that of Achebe parallel each other in certain obvious respects. Both were born in 1930 of mission parents and went through similar childhood experiences.[7] Obi sets out to study law but changes to English, Achebe starts to study medicine but changes to English. Both entered the civil service, but here, fortunately for African Literature, the comparison ends. Obi studies in England for his degree and enters the service at twenty-six--to be convicted about a year later. Achebe read English at Ibadan, joined the Nigerian Broadcasting Service in 1954. He has had an outstanding career as an administrator and lecturer. As a novelist he has written about the tragedy of the Greens, but more about Nigerians involved in the critical conflicts during crucial periods in the last one hundred years or so. Is it possible that in deliberately trying to distance himself from Obi Achebe makes him into something of a scarecrow? Or is Achebe, a confessed ancestor-worshipper,[8] at his best when evoking the past and therefore (at least at the time *No Longer at Ease* was written) less awed by or enthusiastic about events and people in contemporary society?

One cannot excuse the novel's shortcomings by such extenuation, but one particular consideration is important here. The corrupt practices that take place in *No Longer at Ease* owe their origin to an alienation between the individual and society that goes back in Achebe's fiction to the messengers' extortionary practice in *Things Fall Apart*; *A Man of the People* will see the final stage of the process of deterioration acted out when a new African government takes over power in the incipient dawn that Obi's analysis of Mr. Green speaks of. But when the government of a country is seen by its citizens as "an alien institution and people's business was to get as much from it as they could without getting into trouble" (*NLE* IV, 33), one can expect to find that utter dissociation of individual and social values which makes the hybrid Obi Okonkwo who is no longer at ease in the old dispensation equally uncommitted to the new except in a superficial way; and it is the absence of a centre that can hold in Obi's visionary world that brings him down and alienates him from us.

This lack of a centre of gravity is apparent in crucial situations in Obi's career. He is not only ashamed of studying English which he chooses himself but also feels the need to show off his knowledge of Ibo when he meets a fellow Ibo in a London bus and talks in low tones when forced to speak English with Nigerians who are not Ibo speakers. Again, a man with a slightly thicker moral fibre would not have been as vaingloriously elated by the simple virtue of refusing to listen to a bribery proposition from a man in the office he shares with Miss Tomlinson; it is, however, a different proposition when the man's sister offers herself to Obi in her bid to obtain a scholarship that same day and his almost certain capitulation is averted by the arrival of Clara. Besides, Obi is sufficiently unscrupulous and uncharitable to reverse roles with his assiduously Christian father on the issue of his marrying an *osu*. Mr. Okonkwo, on this occasion, laughs the dry, skeletal laughter of a masked ancestral spirit whom mere human beings could not acknowledge knowing. He thus retreats along the corridors of time to the world of his own father whose religion he had turned away from; Obi pontificates, asserting the truth of a gospel he does not believe in when he asks, "Have we not seen the light of the Gospel?" (*NLE* XIV, 133).

At the outset we saw Obi explaining the song of the man who killed an in-law and of the canoe with an English-speaking paddle. Some time after his quarrel with the Union Obi sets about analyzing his relation with his kinsmen and concludes that they have a "sizeable point" when they are critical of his reluctance to start paying back his loan immediately at twenty pounds a month from a forty-seven pounds ten salary, with this qualification:

> What they did not know was that, having laboured in sweat and tears to enrol their kinsman among the shining élite, they had to keep him there. Having made him a member of an exclusive club whose members greet one another with "How's the car behaving?" did they expect him to turn round and answer: "I'm sorry, but my car is off the road. You see I couldn't pay my insurance premium"? That would be letting the side down in a way that was quite unthinkable. Almost as unthinkable as a masked spirit in the old Ibo society answering another's esoteric salutation: "I'm sorry, my friend, but I don't understand your strange language. I'm but a human being wearing a mask." No, these things could not be. (*NLE* X, 98).

Obi represents a transition from the canoe man with the problematic paddle to the city man who cannot pay his insurance premium. In the analysis of the song Obi utilizes a skilful expansion of symbolic associations. The summary of his new status in terms of membership in an exclusive social club is, by comparison, a reduction of the meaning of his role in the service by eliminating his responsibilities. Wearing the surface mask of a new culture, Obi betrays himself by violating the codes of morality in both old and new and lays himself bare as a "Beast of no nation" (*NLE* XVI, 152) with neither substance nor spirit. His passivity as a central character betokens the uneasily calm weather before the stormy conflict of *A Man of the People*.

Chapter VIII

A Man of the People: Anarchy as Archetype

A Man of the People, Achebe's fourth novel, embodies a major new feature in his development as a novelist. It is a first person narrative told from the limited point of view of one of the principal participants in the story, and the accounts are given not very long after the final catastrophe. The major personal conflict in the book is between Chief the Honourable M. A. Nanga, M.P., and Odili Samalu, his former pupil. In his capacity as narrator Odili begins his story with a deliberately sarcastic statement about Nanga. This sarcasm sets the tone for the satire which sometimes involves Odili himself:

> No one can deny that Chief the Honourable M.A. Nanga, M.P., was the most approachable politician in the country. Whether you asked in the city or in his home village, Anata, they would tell you he was a man of the people. I have to admit this from the onset or else the story I'm going to tell will make no sense. (*MP* I, 1).

By making this acknowledgement at the outset Odili Samalu seeks to establish his credibility. But as his account unfolds, because he strives to keep to chronology to avoid making value judgments before the fact, it becomes increasingly apparent that the labelling of Nanga as "a man of the people" is intended to be seen as incongruous in the light of his self-centred corruption, just as his position as the Minister of Culture, given his confident and ignorant flouting of manners and decorum, is, in effect, an anomaly. His unfitness for the political office he occupies and his much vaunted but largely counterfeit altruism towards his people make good sense in the narrator's--and Achebe's--unfolding of the picture of a society out of joint.[1] But it is part of the novel's irony that as narrator of the incidents which lead to the political struggle with Nanga and as portrait painter of the man, Odili succeeds in exposing perhaps more of his own character and motivations than his opponent's, for the whole narrative is told from his point of view rather than from Nanga's. The result is that in the train of events we come to know Odili, in this case not as passive narrator but as active participant, through his varying responses to Nanga's personality. It is he who emerges as something of a hero in the novel's final pages.[2]

Changes in Odili's attitude towards Nanga occur in clearly marked situations in *A Man of the People*. Chronologically, the first occasion is provided in a flashback from the opening scene at the Anata High School where Odili is a teacher and Nanga the guest of honour to the primary school where, in 1948, Nanga was "a popular, young and handsome teacher, most impressive in his uniform as scout master" and

Odili "something like his favourite pupil" (*MP* I, 2). The second occasion, again set in the past, sees Odili as the disgusted witness of a sordid spectacle, replete with anti-African intellectual sentiments, when (according to Odili's testimony) in a shameless bid for a ministerial post Nanga the back-bencher decried the sacked Finance Minister, Dr. Makinde, and his "Miscreant Gang." Nanga's denouncement is for the very unpalatable but much misrepresented austerity measure the Minister proposed with the original backing of his party before the eve of the elections. Odili's initial dislike of Nanga originates from this second episode but it gradually dissolves in the opening chapter: Nanga's recognizing him after about sixteen years both flatters and turns him into an instant, and not the least bit displeased, hero. This encounter marks the beginning of a protracted phase of his sometimes grudging, sometimes open, admiration for his own projected hero, Nanga, which climaxes in a visit to the capital, Bori. It is a visit that, ending abruptly, initiates his final and more permanent antipathy towards the politician and what he stands for.

Odili's character is the only one that undergoes some development in *A Man of the People*, a novel in which Achebe's main preoccupation is with satire as a means of social criticism. Major insights into Odili's character are furnished in the development of the novel as he recapitulates the successive events leading to the final outcome. In the matter of his thoughts and reflections on the corruption and cynicism in the country, the narrator and the author usually speak as one. But as far as his individual actions are concerned, the fact that Odili bears sole responsibility enables Achebe to satirize him. In this regard, his motives for entering politics are quite open to question as they suggest something less than a desire to rid the country of corruption and vice.

His reaction to the luxurious furnishings in the guest suite he occupies is a case in point. Since he is honest about his feelings one should let him comment himself:

> The first thing critics tell you about our minister's official residences is that each has seven bedrooms and seven bathrooms, one for every day of the week. All I can say is that on that first night there was no room in my mind for criticism. I was simply hypnotized by the luxury of the great suite assigned to me. When I lay down in the double bed that seemed to ride on a cushion of air, and switched on that reading lamp and saw all the beautiful furniture anew from the lying down position and looked beyond the door to the gleaming bathroom and the towels as large as a *lappa* I had to confess that if I were at that moment made a minister I would be most anxious to remain one for ever. (*MP* III, 41).

In another episode he muses on the "quick transformations that were such a feature of our country" and notices the changes of attitude he himself has gone through. He had started out with anxiety to become "a full member of the privileged class whose symbol was the car" (*MP* XI, 122) by acquiring a driver's licence in the middle of his three year degree course. Turned away from this acquisitive desire by a radical Irish history lecturer and put off by a former militant Students Union president who subsequently became a very corrupt Permanent Secretary, he had decided to take a teaching job in a "bush, private school" instead of applying for a city-centred civil service job with several amenities, including of course a loan to purchase the prestigious car. The city job would deny him the "certain amount of autonomy" which he has. He would have to stoop to licking boots. In Bori, however, he is dazzled by the magnificence of his close but brief association with Nanga by means of which, contrary to all regulations, he gains ready access to the hospital where Elsie the nurse is working; as he observes, "In our country a long American car driven by a white-uniformed chauffeur and flying a ministerial flag could pass through the eye of a needle" (*MP* VI, 63). An excellent instance of contrast is his rebuff at the hospital where Edna's mother has been admitted when he tries to enter driving a mere tortoise, as Edna's father calls his Volkswagen. The reputation he gains at the party given by the American couple known only as John and Jean (last names are so British) also stems from the fact that his "closeness to the Minister gave everything [he] said heightened significance" (*MP* V, 55). Odili is so caught up with all the glamour of this new-found notoriety which is the after-glow from Nanga's own radiance, that he even begins to resent the implied criticism of Nanga by Jean as she is driving him back to Nanga's residence afterwards, her husband having been called away on business just before the party.

It is in his relations with people--notably Nanga and the women in his life--that Odili becomes himself the butt of Achebe's satire which is quite unsparing of the people and institutions that are encountered, however briefly, in *A Man of the People*. In spite of himself Odili cannot help admiring some of the alluring qualities of

Nanga which he himself lacks. These include, in particular, Nanga's ability to create drama around himself and his knack for getting away with practically everything because of his "rare gift of making people feel--even while he was saying harsh things to them--that there was not a drop of ill will in his entire frame" (*MP* VII, 73). Odili takes himself far too seriously and is too self-conscious to develop the brazen effrontery or genial, if hypocritical, modesty of an M. A. Nanga. His most questionable decisions and drives have to do with his most important activity in the novel: his running for political office; all the same, some understanding of his position is possible in the light of the self-portrait he sketches both consciously and unconsciously.

Odili's initial reaction to Nanga's seduction of Elsie under his very nose is quite natural but his histrionic behaviour towards Nanga afterwards and his plans to take revenge on Nanga demonstrate a personal immaturity. He did not think very highly of the girl because of her all too ready capitulation to him on their first encounter--a fact he mentions perhaps to compensate for his later frustration and rage at her willing submission to Nanga. He also debases his relation with her by telling Nanga that she is just a good-time girl. Moreover his own morals are no higher than Nanga's in the matter of women, though he is perhaps more cautious, for he goes to bed with Jean, the bumptious wife of the American expert, when they are alone together after the party and arranges to see her again before her husband gets back. His chagrin with Nanga derives from his thwarted anticipation of an orgy with Elsie and his helpless impotence when he realizes what his host is up to. What happens to Odili is that he feels his manhood is lost at this point, and retaliation is the only means he sees of regaining his potency. Consequently, a sense of revulsion from whatever Nanga stands for is rekindled in him and, no longer the wise teacher at whose feet a twice-favoured pupil sits to gain knowledge, Nanga reverts for him to the original image of shameless lust for the meaty prize of a ministerial post.

As usual, Odili freely recounts the whole incident involving himself, Nanga and Elsie even though he has been jolted by Nanga's boldness. What makes him really ridiculous is his moral indignation, given his own indiscretions. Although he is uncritical of his own attitude, he views Nanga's action as symptomatic of opprobrious vice and immorality made all the more serious because Nanga is the Minister of Culture. His words recall Obi Okonkwo's reference to his country as an Augean stable: "'What a country!' I said. 'You call yourself Minister of Culture. God help us.' And I spat; not a full spit but a token, albeit unmistakable, one." (*MP* VII, 81).

In the heat of the moment Odili of course forgets that his unfulfilled intention was to bring an extra girl for Nanga whose wife and children have left for Anata. He approves the minister's extramarital affairs, but cannot bring himself to accept an infringement on his own territory as an injury he must endure, with bad grace if necessary.

His reaction and his determination to punish Nanga by defeating him politically does not suggest that his motives are much better than those of the Nangas and Chief Kokos. His token spitting is a reflection of his love for gestures not of any deeply-felt emotions. Therefore, while admitting to himself that he has little hope of winning Chief Nanga's seat from him, he decides to inflate all the scandals that attach to the minister's name. He then deludes himself into thinking that at least the Prime Minister will not give Nanga a ministerial post on account of all the exposures of corruption and that his own role in running for office will attain "the heights of symbolic action, a shining, monumental gesture untainted by hopes of success or reward" (*MP* XII, 146).

If one considers the full extent of Odili's conflict with Nanga, his "monumental gesture" is not only a monumental failure but also far from disinterested. His qualified and sometimes unqualified disdain makes him look on Nanga as a "bush man" and, without stating it in so many words, he considers himself a much better choice as a representative to Parliament for the people of the constituency than the present Minister of Culture. But his motives do not stem simply from an abstract belief in virtuous action as its own reward but have a thorough grounding in personal ambition.

The truth of the matter is that Odili has an admixture of personal ambition and idealism tinged with self-pride. His change of front is dictated by whichever of these forces happens to be in the ascendant.

One illustration of this admixture concerns his ambition to become a member of the élite on graduation. His ambition is later countered by a sense of pride and an abhorrence of malfeasance which puts wealthy Permanent Secretaries swollen with ill-gotten gains into the élitiste class. The best example is no doubt the dispute over Elsie and the developments it sparks off. Odili's first reaction is one of dazed inaction followed by a feeling of deep humiliation. His acute humiliation arising from wounded pride demands redress. He then decides to track down and seduce Edna and immediately after another opportunity presents itself. He will run against Nanga but it is not just his desire for revenge that leads him on: his personal ambition has been rekindled by the foretaste of power and prestige that his short affiliation with Nanga has brought him. But when the odds weigh heavily against him he falls back on the idealism which distinguishes Max and others in his party from the diehard politicians like Nanga and supporters like his own father who look on politics as an engagement for purely personal gain. The failure of his gesture (aptly described by Edna's father as "the challenge of a tick to a bull") lies in his maladroit handling of the campaign.

Before elevating his challenge to Nanga's candidacy to the level of "a shining, monumental gesture" Odili admits in a mood of self-analysis that it was impossible to decide on the importance of his political activity in its own right, adding, "things seemed so mixed up; my revenge, my new political ambition and the girl" (*MP* XI, 121).

He never quite manages to put the interlocking preoccupations into perspective and seems to lack the ruthless energy of M. A. Nanga and the practical self-compromise of Max Kulamo. Even the pair who make up his bodyguard warn him that he "want play too much gentleman" in the campaign as if it is "gentlemanity de give other people minister" (*MP* XI, 128). His overscrupulousness leads him to reject Nanga's offer of two hundred and fifty pounds and a scholarship in return for a signed statement that he is withdrawing from the race for Parliament. This rejection leads to his anger and pique when he learns that Max has accepted a similar offer from his rival, Chief Koko, but for the much higher sum of one thousand pounds. At the same time he starts to pay visits to Mrs. Nanga and Edna, ostensibly as the friend of Nanga, until repudiated by Mrs. Nanga; and his bravado when Edna's father threatens him with a raised matchet is almost a reckless defiance to impress the girl. The extension of his histrionic and impulsive action to the campaign itself underlines the difference between his and his opponent's approach: Nanga is going all-out to win because for him it is a life-and-death struggle, while Odili, having very little at stake, sees the electioneering as a game. His brash appearance at Nanga's inaugural meeting in disguise and without his bodyguard puts an end to his efforts to oust Nanga. Ironically, this last action redeems him from the total failure with politics, revenge and the girl, for Edna, seeing him badly treated and humiliated herself by Nanga, decides against her impending liaison with Nanga and accepts Odili's offer of marriage.

At the end of the novel the whole political structure of the unnamed African country of *A Man of the People*--the connections with Nigeria are, however, obvious--is in shambles. Since much of the novel focuses on Odili's personal and political involvement with Chief Nanga, the political reality in the novel largely comes through episodes involving one or other of the two or in Odili's commentary as narrator. At the end of the book it is Odili's moral high-mindedness which gains the upper hand. Casting aside his own meddlesome and ineffectual campaign strategy, he proceeds to castigate the people for their cynicism and hypocrisy:

> Overnight everyone began to shake their heads at the excesses of the last regime, at its graft, oppression and corrupt government; newspapers, the radio, the hitherto silent intellectuals and civil servants --everybody said what a terrible lot; and it became public opinion the next morning. And these were the same people that only the other day had owned a thousand names of adulation, whom praise-singers followed with song and talking-drum wherever they went. Chief Koko in particular became a thief and a murderer, while the people who had led him on--in my opinion the real culprits--took the legendary bath of the Hornbill and donned innocence. (*MP* XIII, 166).

Odili is very bitter as he says these words. The concluding paragraphs of the novel also take on an added resonance from the fact that Achebe endorses the position, but without any smugness on his part. Odili is no longer "exhilarated . . . by the heady atmosphere of impending violence" (*MP* IX, 112) for he has experienced the unglamorous aspects of violence. Max has been killed. He himself has been brutally manhandled. A period of anarchy has followed the election in which practically all the old politicians, including Chief Nanga, have been voted back to power and ministerial posts in spite of the fact that the elections had been called after their corruption scandals erupted.

Even the army coup, though a present relief, is not seen as a boon. The young army officers have not taken over power as a temporary measure to quickly restore the democratic process. They have "seized the opportunity to take power" (*MP* XIII, 165) because of unrest and dislocation and they immediately ban all political parties. In this way, one set of rulers who have proved themselves unworthy of trust has been removed, but their removal raises one important question at least about their successors: Who do the new rulers get their mandate from seeing that the old guard has been elected by the very people who are now discovering their corruption and oppression as it were for the first time? The opportunity seized can hardly be simply to set the country to rights even though the promise of trials for suspected public servants is reassuring. But what if these young officers themselves become as corrupt and as unwilling to give up power as the last government or as Odili himself has said he would have been if he had all the luxury? Achebe's novel does not attempt to find answers to these questions[3] but it does take up the subject of individual and group responsibility weighed against limiting factors of human nature and human reality.

Broader issues of public morality and the individual's commitment to the public weal play a secondary but very important role in the development of *A Man of the People*. They are second only to the struggle between the protagonist and his antagonist. The sometimes smooth surface of the lives of Nanga and Odili covers an undercurrent of political strife, scandal and potential violence. The novel begins with a retrospective account of the political storm, four years before, when the Prime Minister gave his marathon speech denouncing the ousted finance minister, Dr. Makinde, and two thirds of his other Cabinet members as traitors and saboteurs in league with foreign investors. Four years later, and contemporaneous with the time-span of the novel, the reorganized Cabinet with frontbenchers like Nanga and Koko is exposed after scandal erupts. The air is rife with the threat of strikes, looting and a complete breakdown of law and order, but this has to wait for the cataclysmic events of the electioneering and its aftermath of pillage and destruction. This state of affairs leads Odili to bring his analytic talents to bear on the major issues that lead to catastrophe.

On his first night at Nanga's residence in Bori, Odili ponders on the state of the nation as he luxuriates in the splendour of the guest suite he is occupying. The narrating voice interposes an observation, gained from a chastening experience, to the effect that he should perhaps be thankful that he had never had the opportunity to be in Nanga's present position, for if he had he might want to stay on regardless of consequences. However, it is the goggle-eyed school teacher-protégé of Nanga who makes the following incisive commentary:

> We ignore man's basic nature if we say, as some critics do, that because a man like Nanga had risen overnight from poverty and insigni-

> ficance to his present opulence he could be persuaded without much trouble to give it up again and return to his original state.
>
> A man who has just come in from the rain and dried his body and put on dry clothes is more reluctant to go out again than another who has been indoors all the time. The trouble with our new nation--as I saw it then lying on that bed--was that none of us had been indoors long enough to be able to say "To hell with it". We had all been in the rain together until yesterday. Then a handful of us--the smart and lucky and hardly ever the best--had scrambled for the one shelter our former rulers left, and had taken it over and barricaded themselves in. And from within they sought to persuade the rest through numerous loudspeakers, that the first phase of the struggle had been won and that the next phase--the extension of our house--was even more important and called for new and original tactics; it required that all argument should cease and the whole people speak with one voice and that any more dissent and argument outside the door of the shelter would subvert and bring down the whole house. (*MP* III, 42).

This schematization of the political dilemma of newly independent African nations merits close scrutiny. It is not certain whether Odili has some western European nations, particularly Britain, in mind as examples of peoples who have come a long way from the original state of confusion, vice and bloody struggle. What is clear is the basic human reluctance to yield privilege and power without conflict, no matter what the circumstances of their acquisition or the measures necessary for their retention. Odili's symbol of the man coming in from the rain is not gratuitously introduced but suggests the shadow of Achebe behind the act. The passage is indeed an important formulation of Achebe's view.

Addressing the Nigerian Library Association in 1964, Achebe made the following statement in which he uses an Ibo proverb which he first used in his fiction in *Arrow of God*: "There is a saying in Ibo that a man who can't tell where the rain began to beat him cannot tell where he dried his body. The writer can tell the people where the rain began to beat them."[4] The proverbial rain goes back to *Things Fall Apart* where, in a reference to the way in which the white man's religion and government menace traditional religion and society, an elder warned that they must bale the water which was then only ankle-deep before they were submerged in it (*TFA* XXIV, 183)--a warning that is echoed in *Arrow of God* (*AG* XXIII, 179). A closer symbolic analogy to the rain metaphor can be found perhaps in an earlier episode in that first novel. The story of Vulture bringing rain to a parched Earth and releasing a deluge by accident, is analogous to the well meaning but sometimes disastrous efforts of the Christian missionaries to bring the Gospel to Africans. But in *A Man of the People* there is a big difference. Gone are the former rulers who once occupied the single sheltered alcove of privileged dominance. Instead of attempting to build a general sanctuary for all their people, those who reached the shelter first--"the smart and lucky and hardly ever the best"--go two steps further than the former overlords: they barricade themselves in their inner sanctum of power and call out for an extension of their privilege at the expense of all the P.I.V.'s or Poor Innocent Victims, as Nanga's own relation puts it, who are now even more oppressed from prolonged exposure to the cold and the rain. The chances are that, by all accounts, the masses will have a poor chance of reaching the shelter at all, of drying their bodies and of putting on new clothes.

Achebe's disgust at the fruits of independence is thus expressed in a satiric diminution to the status of common seekers scrambling for cover of the bloated politicians who cast themselves in the role of gods and demi-gods. The new élite exploits its own people even more than the colonizers did, while at the same time seeking in the name of unity to disenfranchize the people from the right of dissent and opposition--the very weapons they had used against the outgoing establishment.

The rain allegory is only a part of the figuration of Achebe's perception of post-independence politics. The allegory is further developed around the fortunes of Josiah, a shop-and-bar owner in Anata. Josiah is first introduced in Chapter I where Nanga is busy impressing his audience with an account of the selfless and unenviable burden of being a minister. He makes it seem like a position whose holder can never manage to keep a penny for himself because he loses all his money to his constituents through generous tips and donations. Everyone is apparently impressed except Josiah who would gladly welcome all the troubles of a minister if he were given all the money that goes with the job. Subsequently, Odili is returning to Anata after his quarrel with Nanga and his invitation to become a member of Max's new political party. A mild uproar centring on Josiah's shop-and-bar leads Odili to enquire about what is happening.

The story he hears is instructive. The greedy Josiah, unsympathetic to the misfortunes of Azoge, a blind beggar, has called him into his shop and, after giving him food and palm-wine, has stolen his stick and replaced it with another one. The commotion is a result of Azoge's shouting out in alarm because the new stick feels strange in his hand and he realizes that Josiah has stolen his stick. The beggar surmises that Josiah wants to use his stick in concocting a charm that would, as one old woman sees it, "turn us into blind buyers of his wares" (*MP* IX, 97). The moral of the whole episode is plain to see. It is expressed in the Ibo proverb that the thief suffers when he has taken enough for the owner to notice. Odili reflects on the ruin of Josiah because of the incident, for no one goes to buy in his shop-and-bar after the theft:

> I thought much afterwards about that proverb, about the man taking things away until the owner at last notices. In the mouth of our people there was no greater condemnation. It was not just a simple question of a man's cup being full. A man's cup might be full and none be the wiser. But here the owner knew, and the owner, I discovered, is the will of the whole people. (*MP* IX, 97).

Granted that this perception is true, one has to pose a number of questions. Why, for instance, is it necessary to have an army coup to remove corrupt politicians at the end of the novel? What is wrong with the ballot box? Again, why is there so much cynicism among the people who laugh resignedly and show no sign of rage or fight when in Odili's inaugural campaign Max cites instance after instance of politicians "who were ash-mouthed paupers five years ago [and have] become near millionaires" (*MP* XII, 139)? To answer these and other questions, Odili, armed with the hindsight of the general election results, modifies both the claim he made when he declared that the owner was the whole people and the forlorn hope which prompted him to think that in the national elections, the people would perhaps reject Nanga's candidacy saying: "No, Nanga has taken more than the owner could ignore." (*MP* XI, 122). It is the remark his father makes soon after his discharge from hospital about Chief Koko, who was killed by Eunice to avenge the death of Max, that prompts his re-examination:

> "Koko had taken enough for the owner to see," said my father to me. It was the day I had gone to visit Eunice and was telling him on my return how the girl had shown no interest in anything--including whether she stayed in jail or out of it. My father's words struck me because they were the very same words the villagers of Anata had spoken of Josiah, the abominated trader. Only in their case the words had meaning. The owner was the village, and the village had a mind; it could say no to sacrilege. But *in the affairs of the nation there was no owner, the laws of the village became powerless.*
> (*MP* XIII, 166-7. Italics mine).

Odili's revised stand on the obligation of the individual to the group is Achebe's own unchanged interpretation of African cultural progression over the last three generations or so. There was order and peace in the archetypal society of *Things Fall Apart* before its capitulation to European colonialism. The capitulation was achieved through anarchy, that is, through the break-up of the old value patterns. In spite, however, of the breakdown of established order, life must go on. And it goes on in the succeeeding generation until a new disruption again upsets the delicate balance of forces and leads to the chaos at the end of *Arrow of God*. Anarchy becomes an archetype. Thus the constant flux of values catches Obi Okonkwo off guard as he tries ineffectually to balance claims of materialism and morality in *No Longer at Ease*. (The fact that he does not belong to any group makes his tragedy a much more personal one than the tragedy of either Okonkwo or Ezeulu.) In *A Man of the People*, except for the idealism of Odili and Max, the equipoise is completely lost; unbridled and unabashed acquisitiveness leads to social and political upheaval because of its magnitude, its universality, and the total absence of any serious commitment to group values or group interest. One of Achebe's observations in a published essay suggests the gap between the worlds of the first novel and the last:

> A man's position in [the old] society was usually determined by his wealth. All the four titles in my village were taken--not given--and each one had its price. But in those days wealth meant the strength of your arm. No one became rich by swindling the community of [sic] stealing government money. In fact a man who was guilty of theft immediately lost all his titles. Today we have kept the materialism and thrown away the spirituality which should keep it in check. Some of the chieftaincy titles and doctorate degrees we assume today would greatly shock our ancestors![5]

The dearth of spirituality within the ranks of the people is a revelation of the complete reversal that has taken place in the interval since the time of Okonkwo. The rising barometer of technological progress and civilization seems to be accompanied by a falling thermometer of religious meaning and relevance. In place of the dread observance of religious rites and sacrifices of propitiation and atonement in a world peopled as much with gods and spirits (good and evil) as with men, there is cynicism and apathy.

No one escapes from the sometimes mild, sometimes trenchant satirical sketches in *A Man of the People*; indeed some characters make their appearance only, as it were, to be ridiculed and consigned once more to oblivion. One such is the African cook who is an adept at preparing all sorts of European dishes but not the African dishes (they are a woman's job and demeaning) that his own wife cooks for him and that Nanga wants. Another is the American who thinks he is posing his questions about the Peace Corps to an "authentic" African only to find out that he is talking to an Afro-American. A third is the whole episode with Chief Koko who thinks his steward has poisoned his Nescafé; in fact, it is the cook's emergency substitute with the special government sponsored local coffee humorously called Our Home Made Stuff or just O.H.M.S. (the parody of the British On His/Her Majesty's Service is obvious here) the taste of which is now foreign to the minister. Many others involve the Nangas or Odili, who on one occasion jumps up to greet Edna--the blade is double-edged--like some woman-fearing Englishman. A very interesting episode also incidentally illustrates Achebe's versatility with language in his modulations from a dialect which represents Ibo through Pidgin (used extensively and uncompromisingly in this novel) to Standard English.[6] In sounding Mrs. Nanga about cocktail parties Odili pretends that she must enjoy them, to which she replies heatedly, "What can you enjoy there? . . . Nine pence talk and three pence food. 'Hallo, hawa you. Nice to see you again.' All na lie lie." (*MP* III, 41).

The more serious aspects of social criticism are often undisguised. Notwithstanding his exposed crimes such as the three blocks of seven-storey luxury flats built at three hundred thousand pounds each from his gains as Trade Minister and all his other nefarious connections with British Amalgamated, Nanga offers Odili a scholarship and two hundred and fifty pounds to boot because, he says, "I feel that after all my years of service to my people I deserve to be elected unopposed so that my detractors in Bori will know that I have my people solidly behind me" (*MP* XI, 132). With such effrontery it is hardly surprising that in the allegorical story of Josiah the people are represented by the blind beggar. The difference is that on the national level the people are too gullible and lethargic to recognize the political power they have. They accept the mere leavings and dregs of the political feast instead of clamouring "for their fair share of the national cake" (*MP* I, 13).

Achebe also draws attention to the hand of outside peoples--British, American, Eastern European--who will not leave the new nation to follow its course, because of their own self-interest. Nanga and the government are supported by the Western nations who want to preserve the *status quo* to protect their continued economic hold, now that the flickering torch of civilization has given way to the neon signs on city streets. The Eastern nations, meanwhile, are trying to plug in to the new states by providing much needed money and equipment to revolutionary movements, since the current popular method of subjugating weak territories is by remote control.

As narrator, Odili's disenchantment with Nanga and with his personal and political policies is unmistakable. As an antagonist who tries to expose this "man of the people," he too comes in for criticism. Not without ambition and with an all too human flair for luxury himself, Odili indulges Nanga for some time in his spurious devotion to the cause of his people. The ironic title leaves one wondering whether Odili is not himself something of a reject, as it is he who survives the catastrophe at the end of the novel. True, he lacks the ruthlessness of Nanga but then the deposed minister was himself a harmless school teacher many years before. Is Odili any more a man of the people, in the real sense, than Nanga, given his dubious motives for entering politics?

There is something naïve in his idealism during the course of events in the story but there is a possibility that he might have been quite chastened by the experience of violence and death. Seven years before his friend Max, who dies in the election battle, had composed a poem about the universal African mother entitled "Dance-offering to the Earth-Mother." Odili has a copy of the poem beside him as he writes the story but the reflections he has on the poem go back to the scene where he and Max muse on it:

> I will return home to her--many centuries have I wandered--
> And I will make my offering at the feet of my lovely Mother:
> I will rebuild her house, the holy places they raped and plundered,
> And I will make it fine with black wood, bronzes and terra-cotta.
>
> I read this last verse over and over again. Poor black mother! Waiting so long for her infant son to come of age and comfort her and repay her for the years of shame and neglect. And the son she has pinned so much hope on turning out to be a Chief Nanga. (*MP* VIII, 91).

The plaintive, self-pitying, accusatory tone of a démodé brand of the poetry of Negritude is apparent in this sentimental outburst and comment. Fortunately it is before the major catastrophe in the novel, before Odili himself has a chance to grow up. For the sickly sentimental picture conjured up here and the African Motherhood it bespeaks survive only in song. The real terror and power of the masks felt in the world of Okonkwos and Ezeulus is no more. The once sacred ceremony of the dancing masks who evoke the real presence of the gods has been destroyed. In *A Man of the People* little boys play at masks, and their Mask, "its wooden mask-face a little askew and its stuffed pot-belly looking really stuffed" (*MP* X, 108), meekly helps to retie the restraining rope that comes off while it is dancing to a jingle:

> Sunday, bigi bele Sunday
> Sunday, bigi bele Sunday
> Akatakata done come!
> Everybody run away!
> Sunday, Alleluia! (*MP* X, 109).

That the Mask display takes place at Christmas and includes Christian references in the jingle would seem to suggest that the profanation is universal. Christopher Okigbo's poem, "Lament of the Drums," richly translates the decline in things of the spirit implied in this situation:

> Masks and beggar-masks
> Without age or shadow
> Broken tin gods whose
> Vision is dissolved.[7]

The comic atmosphere surrounding the boys' profane parody is a sinister reminder of the changing values of society. It reinforces the fact that beautiful as the past has been we cannot return to it wholly. A new set of forces are at play and we have to accommodate to them and if possible forge them for our use.

The apocalyptic vision of *A Man of the People* was fulfilled when, in January 1966, the same month it was published, the first army coup in Nigeria was staged by young army officers. But not even Achebe could have foreseen the betrayals and conflicts that led to civil war, nor the terrible massacres and brutalities that both preceded it and characterized its long duration.[8] The Earth-Mother has again been ravaged. This time, however, the perpetrators are not the legendary men of the white skin with no toes. The fact that white men had been the plunderers under slavery and colonization and that the violence is this time turned inwards on a new and inchoate nation is a sign of the changing facets of history and human relations. In his works Achebe looks beyond the immediate modalities of time, place and particularity to the perennial realities, often painful, occasionally hopeful, in this case frustrating, of human nature and the human condition. It is this feature, above all, that gives his novels their enduring quality and universal appeal.

Achebe's sense of the gradual erosion of a social and moral order is imaged through the symbolism of masks, but in somewhat different fashion from the practice of Senghor. Senghor's first contact with the mask was presumably in the Musée de l'Homme of Paris for his country, Senegal, while rich in other African artifacts, had no tradition of the highly stylized African mask that this poet celebrates in his poetry and prose. Thus, while the mask as symbol and artifact pervades Senghor's verse, the African mask for him is almost exclusively an object of adoration and wonder, the extension of the physical world into a mystico-magical world which belongs expressly to the black man as the elect of God. Only when the mask is worn by the European in Senghor's poetry does it have the connotations of hypocrisy, lies and deceit. Achebe, on the other hand, grew up in a society peopled by mask-presences even though, as the son of Christian missionaries, he was on the outside looking in. His undisguised love of this tradition--a tradition that is flawed, no doubt, like any other--is apparent in his conception and utilization of the mask in his novels. For him, the mask is, first and foremost, a sacred object with an indispensable, ritualistic function in the corporate life of the people he depicts. He subsequently enlarges on the conception of the mask to include secular masks made for individual and sectional interests or for entertainment through spectacle. The progressive disintegration of society in the world of his novels is effectively represented by a corresponding loss in the religious significance of the sacred mask until at the end the sacred and the profane become indistinguishable in the mask-games of little boys. The impact of European civilization is an important factor in this dislocation of order; however, unlike Senghor, Achebe employs the complex symbol of the mask to reflect the grandeur and depravity within a changing African society rather than to glorify African values at the expense of European *mores*.

The sacred mask is fundamental to the societies of the past, that is, to *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God*. In *Things Fall Apart*, the presence of masks is all-pervasive. The nine masked *egwugwu* representing the ancestors sit in judgment on clan disputes and it is even suggested authorially that one of these masks is worn by the hero, Okonkwo. The masks, shrouded in mystery and magic, are very real to these people who have a strong belief, grounded in law and custom, in the mutual interpenetration of a physical world that is also mysterious and a supernatural world that is also concrete. In the land dispute, in the death of an old man and in the unmasking of an *egwugwu* are portrayed the various attributes, functions and awesomeness of the mask-ancestors from the point of view of the people of Umuofia. This insight into the significance and the relationships of mask, ancestor, spirit and god is deepened in *Arrow of God* where a priest-hero attempts to fathom the depths of his power.

At the same time, Achebe introduces the concept of acquisitiveness into the pattern of life in the traditional society of *Arrow of God* in order to lay bare the struggle for political power between the priestly and wealthy factions of the clan. There is, significantly, a steady allegiance to the collective will which is deeply rooted in religion and morality. But Achebe illustrates that in the case of Okonkwo breaches of custom often can be repaired; that in the instance of Ezeulu a powerful individual can insist on the letter instead of on the spirit of the law to the detriment of all; and that in the final analysis, no matter what happens to the individual, society itself, like a sacred or secular mask dancing, goes on changing its position and outlook as the drums which accompany it beat out its changing rhythms.

The two novels depicting modern society, *No Longer at Ease* and *A Man of the People*, reveal the anarchic effects of unbridled corruption. The tragedy of change in African society as Achebe sees it derives from the total bias against African culture held by the culturally ethnocentric colonizers and fostered in the new Africans who succeeded them. Obi Okonkwo and M. A. Nanga are either alienated from the meaningful elements of traditional culture or are unprepared for the infinitely complex obligations in a modern nation state. Obi's missionary upbringing and Western education have denied him knowledge of the esoteric language of the African masks. Although he pretends to have the necessary *savoir faire* his superficial knowledge of and lack of loyalty to traditional lore or modern etiquette leave him without a steadfast moral code. M. A. Nanga, as the embodiment of selfish hypocrisy and ruthless violence in present-day politics, has no place for the mask as artifact of culture and tradition. Figuratively speaking, he wears the universal mask of dissimulation used here to exploit his own people. He travesties not only the best aspirations of the people he represents, but also the best intentions of the originators of the new system of government. While little boys of his village are busy displaying their tame mask, he is busy in the capital selling off national concerns to the bidders who offer the biggest bribes. The excesses and the insensitivity of such men of power inevitably lead to anarchy and ruin.

The sombre note on which *A Man of the People* ends is akin to the general mood of the works of Achebe's countryman Wole Soyinka which from the first reveal a streak of often grim, sometimes humorous satire and acute pessimism. The third section of this study will discuss Soyinka's skepticism about the innate goodness and rationality of *homo sapiens* as this skepticism unfolds in his published plays. These plays are almost all set in a well-defined African locale and Soyinka's philosophical views are expressed in terms of his own indigenous Yoruba cosmology; yet his themes of civilization, history and culture are designed to reflect the common concerns and the universal themes that apply to all humanity.

Chapter IX

A Dance of the Forests: The Universal Dome of Continuity

I

> "Sekoni, what do you say? If the dead are not strong enough to be ever-present in our being, should they not be as they are, dead?"
>
> "T-t-to make such d-d-distinctions disrupts the d-d-dome of c-c-continuity, which is wwwhat life is."
>
> "But are we then," Egbo continued, "to continue making advances to the dead? Why should the dead on their part fear to speak to light?"
>
> "Ththat is why wwe must acc-c-cept the universal d-d-dome, b-b-because ththere is no d-d-d-direction. The b-b-bridge is the d-d-dome of rreligion and b-b-bridges d-d-don't jjjust g-g-go from hhhere to ththere; a bridge also faces backwards."
>
> \- Soyinka, *The Interpreters*.[1]

Before the separate publications of *The Lion and the Jewel* and *A Dance of the Forests* in 1963, Wole Soyinka was perhaps best known as the outspoken young Anglophone from Nigeria who had dared to criticize Negritude, the movement fostered and monopolized by the older Francophones of West Africa and the West Indies, led by Césaire and Senghor. More than ten years since this time, Soyinka is still remembered (and sometimes still misinterpreted) for his famous remark: a tiger does not go about proclaiming his tigritude--he pounces. But his reputation does not now depend on his thoughts about Negritude. In the intervening years, Soyinka has grown in stature to become a well-known international writer--the most prolific and the most versatile from contemporary Africa. He is a major playwright with eight published plays,[2] a significant poet with two volumes of poetry to his credit,[3] a novelist with two published novels and one autobiographical work,[4] an occasional essayist and critic of African literature and culture.

Soyinka's debt to Yoruba tradition is obvious in his earliest published plays, *The Lion and the Jewel* and *A Dance of the Forests* (1963). They were originally written and produced between 1959 and 1960. *The Lion and the Jewel* is a comedy which raises serious questions about society, traditional and modern. Without being reactionary, its ending suggests that wily conservatism can triumph over lip-service modernism. *A Dance of the Forests* is an extremely important play, for it contains a number of *motifs* that Soyinka will draw on in subsequent works. These *motifs* include physical sacrifice for both good and evil ends; the innate depravity of human nature (viewed here against the background of a repetitive cycle of history) which manifests itself as corruption and vice; violence in nature that, at its best, follows a destructive-creative pattern, and that, at its worst, reveals itself as cruel savagery; dance, song and mime used in a development of, sometimes a departure from, traditional culture. All these elements are fused together by a creative imagination that draws upon topical issues and problems in contemporary society to produce works of intensity and complexity.

Many critics have considered Soyinka's writing not only complex and intense, but also difficult and obscure. European critics, with few exceptions, are frequently baffled by his Yoruba *motifs* and iconology. They complain that his unexplained use of symbols and rituals from his traditional Yoruba background hinders their comprehension of the meaning of his work. But even then Soyinka's use of Yoruba tradition is not always orthodox. As a result, he has sometimes puzzled and sometimes irritated purists of Yoruba traditional culture in his occasional departure from the norm when he utilizes Yoruba myths and rituals.[5] African critics unfamiliar with Yoruba cosmology have been equally nonplussed by his complexity. They have, in addition, regretted an intellectualism that has been influenced as much by European art forms, techniques and ideas as by African traditional culture. It must be admitted that Soyinka's complexity and condensation can lead to obscurity and, taken to the extreme, they sometimes detract from the overall merit of works of profound insight such as *A Dance of the Forests* and the novel *The Interpreters*. At the same time, it is true that a fair understanding of relevant aspects of Yoruba philosophy as well as painstaking exploration of the complex structure and symbolism of the more difficult works, will quite often be rewarded with a rich appreciation of Soyinka's views of man in society and of his keen sensibility.

The Yoruba traditionally believe in a pantheon of gods. The supreme deity in this pantheon is Olodumare, who, like Chukwu the

Supreme Being in the Ibo pantheon,[6] is far removed from mortals. According to one popular version of Yoruba creation myth, it was Orisa-nla (later syncretized to Obatala) who created mortals out of common clay after which Olodumare breathed into them the breath of life. In Soyinka's novel, *The Interpreters*, Orisa-nla is one of seven deities featured in Kola's pantheon. These seven are a select few of the four hundred or so gods of the Yoruba pantheon as a whole.[7] There has not always been such a pantheon. The plurality was created when, in a moment of blind jealousy, Atooda, a slave to Orisa-nla, rolled a mighty stone on his unwary master whose head disintegrated to become a plurality of gods. The creation of men, however, took a much longer time to accomplish and on a day of drunken indiscretion Orisa-nla created the blind, deformed, albinos and other freaks of nature. He atoned for this by consecrating these abnormal people and by forbidding the consumption of palm wine among his worshippers.

A similar indiscretion is held to have been committed by Ogun, the god of War and Creativity, Guardian of the Road and Hunter. Tradition has it that Ogun, as unwilling King of Ire, went to battle and in a state of drunkenness heightened by the sight of blood, he turned on his own men and slaughtered them. The throne had been a reward for his plunge into the gulf that separated god and man while his indiscretion was a punishment for his act of will and pride in cleaving a path to man. Soyinka celebrates this divine carnage in his long poem, *Idanre*, for which he wrote a preface. In the preface, he says this of *Idanre vis-à-vis* recent development in Nigeria: "As events gathered pace and unreason around me I recognized it as part of a pattern of awareness which began when I wrote *A Dance of the Forests*." The poem, he believes, has made "abundant sense in the human context" of Nigerian society from the time of the October 1965 uprising to the Nigeria-Biafra war that eventually erupted. He continues: "And since then, the bloody origin of Ogun's pilgrimage has been, in true cyclic manner most bloodily re-enacted."8

Soyinka's fascination with Ogun is very much in view in *A Dance of the Forests*, the only play in which the god takes form as a character, and an important one, in the unfolding drama. But this fascination goes beyond Ogun's embodiment of the cyclical pattern of destruction. Soyinka was drawn in particular to the god's ambivalent role. As god of War, Ogun embodies the destructive principle. In addition to his function as the god of Iron and Metallurgy, Patron of Hunting and Guardian of the Road, he is also the Creative Essence. He is at once destroyer and creative (but not creating) impulse. While Soyinka would extol the work of life-creating forces, the relative unimportance of Olodumare and of Orisa-nla and the importance of Ogun in his thinking shows the tragic vein which runs throughout his work. It is a work that explores the profoundly dark terrain of man's destructive path throughout history, a dark, pernicious process that is relieved only by the occasional spark of the creative spirit and the possibility but not the promise of an eventual escape from the cyclical pattern of destruction. This pattern is symbolized in Yoruba mythology by a snake eternally devouring its own tail and Ogun sometimes wears around his neck a carving typifying this phenomenon.

Soyinka's pessimism over man and his world contrasts with Senghor's optimism about humanity and his vision of a world of complementarity and brotherhood. Far from dwelling on the forces of destruction (except in poems of Negritude where he opposes white death to black life) Senghor is apt to confound life and death which, for him, are joined by "a bridge of sweetness." If Soyinka confounds life and death, it is that he sees them both against the same grey background of a tragic human situation. This bleak picture of existence is nowhere more explicitly expressed than in the section entitled "Of Birth and Death" in *Idanre and Other Poems,* in which the forces of death predominate. In the poem, "Abiku," for example, this "wanderer child . . . who dies and returns again and again to plague the mother"[9] represents man's cycle of death, a cycle in which mounds of death are shaped from the yolk of life. In the last poem of the section, Soyinka espouses things of grey--a colouring that is present in other poems in the volume and in his tragic plays.

Soyinka's African ontology accords well with Senghor's and with Achebe's on general principles. Life is not divided into measurable moments of time, as in Western thought, but into three interpenetrating phases: pre-life, life and after-life. Senghor establishes the connection among the stages of existence in his mystique about the ever-present Ancestor in his veins and in his recall of "the abyssal night in our mother," the "[m]emory of times without history . . . before we were born" (*NO* 19, 13). Achebe brings the world of the spirits into contact with the world of the living through the *egwugwu* and other spirit masks as well as through the agency of priests and diviners; the episodes in *Things Fall Apart* concerning Ezinma the *Ogbanje*--the Ibo equivalent of the Yoruba *Abiku*--also demonstrate the interpenetration of these levels of existence.

Soyinka, in many of his plays, effectively dramatizes Yoruba belief in the mutual dependence of the differing areas of existence. For this he uses recurrent symbols of gods and spirits; myth and ritual; song, dance and mime as elements in a feast. The Abiku child plays a very important part in *A Dance of the Forests* as an embodiment of Soyinka's belief that the newly-born nation, Nigeria, like the wanderer child, is born with death in the soul. Gods and spirits also make their presence felt more tangibly in this than in any other of Soyinka's plays, and two ancestors, at the invitation of their human descendants, reappear to provide object-lessons for the present generation. *The Road*, a later play, enacts a ritual of possession during which a god becomes apparent while its sequel, *Kongi's Harvest*, celebrates a Yoruba king's feast[10] with song and dance and feasting that are more elaborate than those of *The Lion and the Jewel* and *The Strong Breed* and better realized than the abrogated festival of *A Dance of the Forests*.

It is noteworthy that although there is considerable interaction among the different levels of existence, the true passage of an entity from one level to another is marked by an indispensable rite of transition. The child that is born has to be welcomed in a special ceremony after he is a few days old and only then is he properly a member of this world. Similarly, death, which is simply a transition from this world to the other and not a phase in itself,[11] is also celebrated in ritual. While there are no clearly marked progressive steps in the other two spheres, the compass of life has principal subdivisions. There is the rite of circumcision, of initiation into man- or womanhood, various cult rites and the rite of marriage. These rites--the rites during life as well as the *rites de passage* from one level of experience to another--are characteristically performed or, at any rate, begun in or near the forest, the abode of gods and spirits.

Soyinka has discussed the importance of the area of transition in a key essay entitled "The Fourth Stage." Ogun's importance derives from the fact that he was the first to dare and conquer "the fourth area of experience, the immeasurable gulf of transition."[12] This gulf is "the fourth stage, the vortex of archetypes and home of the tragic spirit." It is the abyss that separates the other stages of existence, namely the past, present and future represented by the ancestors, the living and the unborn respectively. Living man is in the centre of this co-extensive universe. Soyinka makes this pointed observation:

> In a parallel relationship, that is, the relationship of what is directly attainable and what is not, the deities stand in the same situation to the living as do the ancestors and the unborn, obeying the same laws, suffering the same agonies and uncertainties, employing the same masonic intelligence of rituals for the perilous plunge into the fourth area of experience, the immeasurable gulf of transition. Its dialogue in liturgy, its music takes the form from man's incomprehensible knowledge of this area of existence, buried wholly from rational recognition. The source of the possessed lyricist,

> chanting hitherto unknown mythopoeic strains whose antiphonal refrain is however immediately recognized and thrust with all its terror and awesomeness into the night by swaying votaries, this source is residual in the numinous area of transition.[13]

In his major plays (except, perhaps, *Madmen and Specialists*) but chiefly in *A Dance of the Forests* and *The Road*, Soyinka attempts to plunge the main personages--and us--into this "rationally incomprehensible" area of experience. To achieve this he draws on "the primal simultaneity of art forms in a culture of total awareness and phenomenal involvement."[14] In this sense the plays are in the best tradition of folk theatre which Soyinka helped build as actor-producer and as founder of two Nigerian theatre companies--the 1960 Masks and the Orisun Theatre.[15] As if to insist on this involvement in his plays, which in *The Road* climaxes in the dance of possession, Soyinka uses Yoruba language especially for the songs: the tonal rhythms of Yoruba are in tune with the drums and the dancing, and all three--language, music and action--are inseparable from the performance of ritual. Soyinka thus owes a great debt to traditional wisdom and culture which he fashions into a literary credo.

Soyinka's reliance on African tradition is, however, far from absolute. He also taps the rich fund of European, or more narrowly Christian, tradition which he exploits for his own purposes. In this connection, he shares a common intent with fellow Nigerian Christopher Okigbo, poet of *Labyrinths*, who was killed during the Nigerian crisis.[16] Christian allusions are perhaps more common in Soyinka's own poetry than in his novels or plays. In his plays, which are the primary focus of this study, there are many ideational and situational echoes of the Bible. But the key symbol is that of Messianism. On one level, it is embodied in Eman's willing self-sacrifice as carrier of the villagers' sins of the year in *The Strong Breed*. The mishandling of his gesture of goodwill turns the act of atonement into a curse. On another level, Brother Jeroboam, the protagonist of *The Trials of Brother Jero*, is the earliest example of a false Messiah, Professor who is searching for the Word in *The Road* the most fully realized, and Kongi, the self-transfigured dictator of *Kongi's Harvest* perhaps the most sinister, certainly the most topical in the post-independent Africa of the mid nineteen sixties.

A Nigerian critic, Oyin Ogunba, has commented that Soyinka "does not seem to like Messiahs--whether they are ascetic or Epicurean--for each kind indulges in some ridiculous excess which undermines the very principle on which the idea is based."[17] Soyinka loathes all self-projected Messiahs who claim sainthood and superiority over the rest of mortality since they come from the same common clay. Their pretence to godhead or saintliness is an act of self-indulgence which is more often than not a blind for their own exploitive designs on humanity. The humiliation of the priest Kadiye in *The Swamp Dwellers* is an example of Soyinka's disgust with the breed he has called "priest-scavengers" in the poem "Hunt of the Stone" from *A Shuttle in the Crypt* (p. 53). But the trait is found not only in the"spiritual priesthood" but also in the "political priesthood" as Aafaa describes religion and politics in *Madmen and Specialists*. Dr. Bero, the hero of this play, represents the last stage of self-aggrandizement when megalomaniacs overreach themselves in the exhibition of their base humanity through a refinement of the inhuman art of torture.

It may seem that Soyinka's purpose in his major works is to denigrate mankind by presenting an unflattering portrait of man's history and destiny. But Soyinka merely wishes to call man to an awareness of himself and his plight so that, through the effort of his will, he can alter his present senseless course, fraught with needless pain of suffering, violence, deceit, lies and hypocrisy, as a prelude to a new era of communion and peace founded on honesty, truth and goodwill. The fact that this message seems to be lost under the weight of indictments is not enough to deny its existence or its fervour. But Soyinka is too much of a realist to trust that this effort will be made without the continual pricking of man's conscience. Once in a while, however, as in "Conversation at Night with a Cockroach" which is part of the record of Soyinka's imprisonment during the Nigerian Civil War, the dull grey background suddenly brightens and lets in a shaft of sunlight:

> We sought to speak
> Each to each in accents of trust
> Dispersing ancient myths in clean breezes
> To clear the path of lowland barriers
> Forge new realities, free our earth
> Of distorting shadows cast by old
> And modern necromancers. No more
> Rose cry and purpose, no more the fences
> Of deceit, no more perpetuity
> Of ancient wrongs. (*A Shuttle in the Crypt* pp. 6-7).

The hope is however a passing one, the streak of light all too brief:

> But we were wise to portents, tuned
> As tinsel vanes to the dread approach
> Of the Visitation. And while the rumble yet
> Was far, we closed, we spread the tentacles.
> (*A Shuttle in the Crypt* p. 7).

Four plays by Soyinka will subsequently be studied. These major works which show Soyinka's development as an artist, will be considered chronologically. The primary significance of *A Dance of the Forests*, completed in 1960 and first published three years later, is that it contains a complex of themes that are isolated and developed in later plays. Already in this play, Soyinka's purview of civilization and history is apparent. *The Road*, 1965, is a partly symbolic, partly mystical and partly realistic play in which Ogun, god of the road of progress and death, has special prominence. The eclectic use of Yoruba and Christian symbols in this play climaxes with Professor's brand of communion service celebrated with palm wine in his bid to discover the mysteries of a god in Ogun possession. *Kongi's Harvest*, 1967, depicts a modern dictator who considers his own apotheosis as an important condition for the fulfilment of the nation's five-year development plan. In *The Lion and the Jewel* a chief can battle and win against the forces of a dubious modernism. In *Kongi's Harvest* the lethal forces of Kongi, as Chief of State, can often survive a challenge from tradition which differs from modernism in degree but not in kind. Finally, *Madmen and Specialists*, 1972, contains an echo of the satirical episode in *A Dance of the Forests* in which Mata Kharibu, the ruler, relying on good historical precedent, goes to war to recover his stolen wife's trousseau. The grim aftermath of war, depicted in *Madmen and Specialists*, in which the war victims relive moments of desolation, savagery, terror and torture is a terrifying reaffirmation of Soyinka's skepticism about the inherent quality of human nature.

II

The obvious patterning after Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is perhaps the first most striking feature of Soyinka's *A Dance of the Forests*. Apart from the forest setting and the other-worldly atmosphere of the play, elements such as disguise, a prologue, a play-within-a-play, magical happenings involving gods, spirits and demons reflect a consanguinity with Elizabethan and Jacobean drama. But the diaphanous lightness of the dream vision, "'Twixt sleep and waking," that Shakespeare celebrates in comedy is radically different from the disturbing nightmare that Soyinka enacts before us in a more or less tragic vein. The radically different purpose of each dramatist perhaps makes the differences between the two plays more remarkable than their similarities. For, despite the many parallels, *A Dance of the Forests* deals with contemporary society. Its original title was *A Dance of the African Forests*[18] and indeed the context of the play as well as its rituals and characters are unmistakably African. But by the time it was completed, Soyinka had enlarged its scope to include all men everywhere.

Aroni's Prologue (*FP* 1-2) is virtually indispensable to an understanding of the involved plot of *A Dance of the Forests*. In his Prologue Aroni reveals that he had answered the request of the "Human Community" for illustrious ancestors to attend their "Gathering of the Tribes" (Nigeria's Independence Celebrations in October 1960) by sending them "two spirits of the restless dead." The complexity of the plot structure becomes almost immediately apparent since, in his next words, he indicates that the double lives of the characters are implicated in the plot:

> "THE DEAD MAN, who in his former life was a captain in the army of Mata Kharibu, and the other, . . . THE DEAD WOMAN, in former life, the captain's wife. Their choice was no accident. In previous life they were linked in violence and blood with four of the living generation. The most notorious of them is ROLA, now, as before, a whore. And inevitably she has regained the name by which they knew her centuries before--MADAME TORTOISE. Another link of the two dead with the present is ADENEBI, the Court Orator, oblivious to the real presence of the dead. In previous life he was COURT HISTORIAN. And I must not forget DEMOKE, the Carver. In the other life, he was a POET in the court of Mata Kharibu. AGBOREKO, the Elder of Sealed Lips performed the rites and made sacrifices to Forest Head. His trade was the same in the court of Mata Kharibu. When the guests had broken the surface of earth, I sat and watched what the living would do.
>
> "They drove them out. So I took them under my wing. They became my guests and the Forests consented to dance for them. Forest Head, the one who we call OBANEJI, invited Demoke, Adenebi, and Rola to be present at the dance. They followed him, unwillingly, but they had no choice." (*FP* 1).

The plot is further complicated by a dispute between two gods--Ogun, the god of War and Eshuoro, a composite of Chance (Esu) and the bestial in humanity (Oro).[19] Their dispute is linked to Demoke, Ogun's protégé who has used *araba* (the silk cotton tree) which is sacred to Oro for a carving to commemorate the feast. It is Demoke who supplies the final link in the chain of circumstances by violently pulling down to his death his apprentice, Oremole, who is a servant of Oro. Aroni concedes that the dance of welcome for the dead is "not as dignified a Dance as it should be" owing to the machinations of Eshuoro. But Eshuoro's intrigue is only one more facet in a complex and at times obscure mask-presentation that takes up the second half of the play.

If there is a discernible main plot in *A Dance of the Forests*, it is the dance of welcome for the dead couple who are the first to appear in the play. The attempts by the living in Part I and by Eshuoro in Part II to abort the welcome can then be seen as sub-plots. But Dead Man and Dead Woman are themselves passive spectators in the unfolding drama which is stage-managed by Forest Head and Aroni. Motive and action are, however, relegated to the human beings on one level and to the vying deities on another.

In reality, the plot development of *A Dance of the Forests* does not centre around any one character or group of characters. The grim forest setting with its sombre rituals is, first of all, an inverted parallel of the city atmosphere where joyous feasting and dancing are taking place. Secondly, Soyinka uses myth and allegory less to develop character or analyze motives than to propound the thesis of the ubiquity of what he has called, in a key phrase, "the black portion of a common human equation."[20]

Although the principal human characters--Demoke, Adenebi and Rola--are not the prime focus of the action in *A Dance of the Forests*, their motives and actions are important directional guides into the heartland of Soyinka's metaphysic. Initially they are unaware of each other's identity and each seeks to supply an ostensible reason for coming into the forest. As they are led deeper into the forest, the prodding of Obaneji (Forest Father) and, in the case of Demoke, the intermittent encounters with the two dead ancestors bring out something of their true character. While Demoke is the first professional to be identified, then Adenebi, it is Rola the prostitute who is first shown to have violent links with the past. Rola's coquetry is established when she openly tries to seduce Demoke as soon as she learns that he is the famous carver. But it requires Obaneji's comment that the graveyard is full of her lovers and Rola's continued taunting after this to bring recognition of her true identity to Demoke:

DEMOKE: [*suddenly.*] Madame Tortoise! Blind. Blind. [*Hitting himself on the forehead.*] Madame Tortoise, that is who you are!

[Rola stands stock-still, her face drained of expression.]

OBANEJI: [*quietly.*] You've been begging for a stone to hit you on the head. Couldn't you be quiet?

ROLA: [*breaking down.*] What have I done to you? What have I ever done to you?

[She falls on her knees, still sobbing.]

ADENEBI: Do you know what you have just said? You had better be sure it is true.

OBANEJI: He seems to know her. I thought she was tougher.

DEMOKE: Madame Tortoise. Just think . . . I have been with her all day . . .

ROLA: [*raises her head suddenly.*] Isn't that enough? Have you all suddenly earned the right to stare at me as if I was leprous? You want me to wallow in self-disgust. Well, I won't. I wasn't made the way you think women are.

ADENEBI: What! No shame. No shame at all.

DEMOKE: Please, don't upset yourself--not over *him*.

ROLA: Ho. You are very kind, are you not? You think you have enough for yourself that you can spare me some pity. Well keep it. Keep it. Just what is it you all accuse me of?

OBANEJI: [*placatingly.*] Nothing. Nothing.

ADENEBI: Nothing? Do you call that nothing? Two lovers in the

> graveyard. And the sordidness of it. The whole horrible scandal. . . . (*FP* 22).

This series of exchanges reveals the attitudes of the characters. Forest Head, whose disguise as Obaneji remains intact throughout, is preparing the human protagonists for the ritual by exposing them to one another and to themselves. At the same time, by placating the trio he avoids open hostility. Rola, feeling that her mask of respectability will not be removed, decides to take the offensive. But when Demoke stumbles on the truth and calls her by her legendary name, Madame Tortoise, she breaks down only to assume a defiant posture when she mistakes Demoke's wonderment for pity. Adenebi's sense of outrage at her brazen defiance is a cover for his own culpability.

Demoke's amazement stems from the fact that inspiration for the carving of the totem came in part from the image of Madame Tortoise he had before him as he worked. That image however has an innate rather than a facial resemblance to the present Madame Tortoise:

> DEMOKE: You don't look one bit similar to your other face--you know, the one that rises from legends. That was the one I thought of. I thought of you together, but . . . you are not the same. Anyway, you can have a look at my totem and tell me. I needed some continuity and you provided it. (*FP* 25).

The continuity that he needs, although he himself may not be fully aware of its implications, is that which underlies the universal cycle of human violence. Soyinka emphasizes the ingrained similarity rather than the superficial resemblance of past, present and future not only in the totem but also in the double lives of the characters, in the acts of violence they commit and in the complex symbolism involving the Abiku child during the rites of welcome. That a whore should be one of the informing impulses behind the totem of the new nation is one of the play's ironies.

Soyinka's use of a whore is ambivalent. Woman's natural function is primarily procreational, but the aberrance of man in society diverts this into a *re*creational process. Apart from the ultimate barrenness that this aberration suggests, violence is linked with the predatory Madame Tortoise's exploitation of men. Thus, one of the soldiers that the ancient Madame Tortoise seduces jumps to his death when she is no longer accommodating; Rola, the contemporary Madame Tortoise, has similarly been responsible, if only indirectly, for the premature death of two of her lovers. Paradoxically, also, she has been an inspiration behind the creation of a work of art which Forest Head himself, as Obaneji, has praised: "Unfortunately I have seen so much and I am rarely impressed by anything. But that . . . [i.e., the totem] was the work of ten generations. I think your hands are very old. You have the fingers of the dead." (*FP* 7). Madame Tortoise is in fact typical of the *femme fatale* who fascinates Soyinka. Simi of *The Interpreters*, Segi of *Kongi's Harvest* and Iriyise of *Season of Anomy* are also members of this breed.

Adenebi's moral outrage when he learns of Rola's true identity brands him as an early version of Professor Oguazor and Sir Derinola of *The Interpreters*. He is the only member of Obaneji's group to accuse her directly of what the affected Professor Oguazor calls "meral terpitude." He projects a moral high-mindedness that makes Rola unfit for his company. His self-projection as the arch critic is not borne out by the evidence; for, on learning that Madame Tortoise is the subject of the work, he writes off his earlier admiration for the carver with the declaration that the carving is "utterly bestial" (*FP* 23). Adenebi is, in essence, a vacillating individual whom Soyinka caricatures for the deadly sins of hyprocisy, corruption, inauthenticity and misplaced values, all of which are among the sins that incur this playwright's indignation.

Adenebi is the most contemptible of the three human protagonists not because he has perpetrated the most heinous crime--it is Demoke who is directly responsible for the treachery which involves Oremole--but because he affects an air of probity that masks his utterly bestial corruptness. Because he has so much to hide, he is the wariest of the three characters when he answers Obaneji's unobtrusive questions. Asked about the identity of the councillor who took the bribe for increasing the official passenger capacity of a lorry from forty to seventy people "for the sake of records" (*FP* 17), he reverts to his usual paltering:

OBANEJI: Mr. Adenebi. What office do you hold in the council?
ADENEBI: [*angrily*.] What do you imply?
OBANEJI: You misunderstand me. I only meant, are you in a position to find out something for me?
ADENEBI: [*warily*.] That depends. I am only the official Orator to the Council, but . . .
OBANEJI: You do wield some authority.
ADENEBI: Yes. Certainly.
OBANEJI: You see, I want to close my files on this particular lorry--the Incinerator. And my records won't be complete unless I have the name of the man who did it--you know, the one who took the bribe. Do you think you can help me there?
ADENEBI: Since you are so clever and so knowledgeable, why don't you find that out yourself?
OBANEJI: Please . . . it is only for the sake of records . . .

> ADENEBI: Then to hell with your records. Have you no feeling for those who died? Are you just an insensitive, inhuman block?
>
> OBANEJI: I didn't kill them. And anyway, we have our different views. The world must go on. After all, what are a mere sixty-five souls burnt to death? Nothing. Your bribe-taker was only a small-time murderer; he wasn't even cold-blooded. He doesn't really interest me very much. I shall be writing his name in small print. (*FP* 17-18).

Adenebi is reluctant to disclose the name of the guilty councillor because he is that councillor. It is in fact the crime that justifies his presence in the group and his preoccupation with his self-image prevents him, as Aroni tells us in his Preface, from recognizing the presence of the dead among them. His lack of rectitude which leads him to take bribes as a councillor is kept well hidden from the public gaze. Instead, it is the image of the arch moralist and the image of prideful defender of the tribe's cultural heritage that he puts forward. The arch moralist in him is apparent in his outrage when he learns of Rola's true identity. His image as preserver of custom comes out in his exchange with Demoke's father about their attempt to celebrate the Gathering of the Tribes in classic style:

> ADENEBI: I remember what I said, what we promised to do. An occasion such as the gathering of the tribes--a great thing . . . it would happen only once in several lifetimes . . . only once in centuries of history. It is a whole historical epoch in itself. We resolved to carve a totem, a totem that would reach to the sky.
>
> . . . .
>
> Well, in addition I said; . . . no, you said, and I took it up, that we must bring home the descendants of our great forebears. Find them. Find the scattered sons of our proud ancestors. The builders of empires. The descendants of our great nobility. Find them. Bring them here. If they are half-way across the world, trace them. If they are in hell, ransom them. Let them symbolize all that is noble in our nation. Let them be our historical link for the season of rejoicing. Warriors. Sages. Conquerors. Builders. Philosophers. Mystics. Let us assemble them round the totem of the nation and we will drink from their resurrected

glory.
OLD MAN: Yes. It was a fine speech. But control, at some point was lost to our enemies. The guests we were sent are slaves and lackeys. They have only come to undermine our strength. To preach to us how ignoble we are, . . . (*FP* 32).

In this dialogue Adenebi and Old Man speak of the African past with a nostalgia that has come to be associated with the school of Negritude. The longing is for an idyllic past including only those elements and ancestors that "symbolize all that is noble" in past history. It is an Edenic past that may be lived in the subjective reality of song and poetry. The playwright believes that in real life this assemblage of illustrious personages is always equalled, if not surpassed, by a corresponding gallery of infamous rogues and villains. Even before he became famous, then, for his criticism of Negritude, it is evident that already in this early play Soyinka is criticizing preoccupation with past greatness as misguided and misplaced.

Because the play is primarily satirical, Soyinka does not attempt to present a balanced portrait of past empires or present national interests. The splendour of ancient civilizations had been so often vaunted in the decade of the nineteen fifties as black African states stood on the threshold of independence that Soyinka must have felt the need to correct such nostalgic euphoria. Accordingly, the festivities and spectacles of the new nation's celebrations are reduced to oral reports by the characters and to the sound of rejoicing in the background of this independence play. In place of revellers, the foreground is held by criminal members of society while the dead representatives who linger in the background are reminders of an ignoble past.

But the indictment of the past is confined neither to ancestral delegates nor to the human representatives involved in the welcome for the dead which is the forest's answer to the town's exclusivist celebration. The very totem that the council appointed Demoke to carve is a reminder of the ignominy of the past. Ironically, it is Adenebi, a proponent of the carving of the totem, who unwittingly stumbles on the truth about the work he seems to have approved of before. In the course of his conversation with Demoke's father about the dead man and woman who have been sent as accusers he tells the old man " . . . By the way, I really ought to tell you how disappointed I was with your son's handiwork. Don't you think it was rather pagan? I should have thought something more in keeping with our progress would be more appropriate." (*FP* 33).

The truth of the matter is that the work is in a sense pagan and also bestial as Adenebi earlier suggested. In Soyinka's view, it is however totally "appropriate" and "in keeping" with the progress of the new nation. The paganism and bestiality are in the *subject* of the sculpture, which ultimately symbolizes the human society beyond the forest, not in the craftsmanship of the sculptor. Demoke has simply typified, through the totem, the continuing cycle of treachery and violence that neutralizes or nullifies whatever progress has been made. Adenebi's disenchantment with the totem, like the rejection of Dead Man and Dead Woman as guests at the Gathering, is an indication of the human distaste for the unvarnished truth.

The "accumulated heritage" which he says is being celebrated in "this era of greatness" (*FP* 8) is less a record of goodness and justice than of villainy and violent injustice. Thus it is only when we accept, in penance and humility, the latent violence in human nature and the record of it in human history that we can hope to make the real progress we speak so much of.

Demoke is the only one of the three human protagonists to acknowledge his latent violence. As the artist, he is the sensitive point of his community. He represents the creative spark in man which produces works of insight that characterize society. Since the artist in traditional African society employs a variety of forms Demoke thus stands for musician, dancer, singer, spokesman, critic and conscience in addition to his role of consummate sculptor.[21] He indeed possesses qualities the absence of which Soyinka deprecates in the modern African writer who should be no less versatile an artist and critic of contemporary society than his traditional counterpart or forbear.[22] As an artist, Demoke has created a work of art that has stood up to the test of public scrutiny, Adenebi's disparagement notwithstanding. He has however sacrificed the life of his apprentice, Oremole, in order to summon the demiurge necessary for the creation of the imposing work of genius.

Demoke's conscience pricks him because he knows that he is the cause of his bondsman's death. On account of this awareness, he recognizes the dead pair instinctively and, when plagued by their continued reappearance, he is forced to ask them whether the spirit of Oremole accuses him. Unprovoked, he later confesses his guilt in the longest speech of the play, Aroni's Prologue excepted.

The speech is more an expression of pride and joy at his feat, however, than a confession. Demoke is proud of his famed skill in wood and is at the same time condescending towards Oremole whom he brands as more of a carpenter than a carver. The conflict between acrophobic master and nimble apprentice is deepened by their different allegiances. Oremole is a worshipper of Oro who, as the combined deity Eshuoro, seeks to exact vengeance both for Demoke's sacrilege in carving *araba* and for his slaying of the god's disciple. Demoke is a follower of Ogun, god of War and Creativity. In the latter half of his speech the artist recounts the violent origin of his work with the silk cotton tree:

> Thrice I said I would behead it
> Where my feet would go no further. Thrice
> Oremole, slave, fawner on Eshuoro laughed.
> "No one reduces Oro's height, while I serve
> The wind. Watch Oremole ride on Aja's head,
> And when I sift the dust, master, gather it
> Below." The water-pot, swept up suddenly
> Boasted, Aja is my horse. Has it got wings
> Or is it not made of clay? I plucked him down!
> Demoke's head is no woman's cloth, spread
> To receive wood shavings from a carpenter.
> Down, down I plucked him, screaming on Oro.
> Before he made hard obeisance to his earth,
> My axe was executioner at Oro's neck. Alone,
> Alone I cut the strands that mocked me, till head
> And boastful slave lay side by side, and I
> Demoke, sat on the shoulders of the tree,
> My spirit set free and singing, my hands,
> My father's hands possessed by demons of blood
> And I carved three days and nights till tools
> Were blunted, and these hands, my father's hands
> Swelled big as the tree-trunk. Down I came

> But Ogun touched me at the forge, and I slept
> Weary at his feet. (*FP* 27-8).

The confession brings catharsis to Demoke even though he shows no contrition. Soyinka uses Adenebi (whose hedging is in marked contrast with Demoke's openness) as a spokesman, but it is Demoke who acts as the rarely stricken conscience of society. A guilty man himself, however venial his crime, the artist can assist his people, by precept and example, to open a pathway towards sanity and salvation. If the meaning of Demoke's totem is comprehended, the finished work should worry as well as divert the collective mind of society.

The totem emerges as a multi-faceted symbol. Its violent and bestial theme is, as we have seen, no accident since it represents the inherent properties of human nature. Like Sekoni's frenzied sculpting of "The Wrestler" in *The Interpreters* it is, in addition, a masterpiece. But although Demoke had a directive from the council to carve the totem, he was given no idea what it was intended for. The appropriateness of Demoke's theme derives from his psychic grasp of the spirit of the times.

> DEMOKE: For one thing, I did not know what it was all about. The council met and decided that they wanted it done. In secret. The tree was in a grove of *Oro*, so it was possible to keep it hidden. Later I learnt it was meant for the gathering of the tribes. When I finished it, the grove was cleared of all the other trees, the bush was razed and a motor road built right up to it. It looked different. It was no longer my work. I fled from it. (*FP* 7-8).

This statement implies that the council, for all the eloquent speeches of its members, was planning to erect a monument to the nation without attaching any importance to the carving's *motif*. Not only do they show ignorance about their culture and its significance, but they are also insensitive to the artist's conception of his work. Concerned only with image-building and publicity, they lay bare the area around the totem and build a motor road right up to it. The motor road and the cleared forest are symptoms, no doubt, of modern technological progress and civilization; but this secularization strips the totem of whatever sanctity it might have had and makes it a popular spectacle which its creator can no longer recognize as his work. The insensitivity of the councillors to the totem's intrinsic meaning and purpose consequently exposes their desire to return to the glory of past empires for cosmetic rather than metaphysical reasons, a hollow wishfulness rather than a serious commitment to tradition and culture.

The council's obsession with the trappings and not the essence of grandeur and tradition is illustrated in the puny and ludicrous attempts by Old Man and his attendants to ward off their guests at the welcome. Not content with expelling them from the town, the council seeks to oust them from the forest as well, to prevent their indictment of the present generation. Old Man is desperately anxious to circumvent the forest's welcome because his son, Demoke, whom he wanders all over the forest to find, is implicated. Agboreko, the Elder of Sealed Lips who performed the rites imploring the representation of the ancestors at their feast, is with the group to divine whether or not the forest will receive the guests. Agboreko consults Murete, the tree-demon. Murete is the link between the spirits of the forest and the human community and therefore gives (and sometimes withholds) information to mortals and spirits alike about the happenings in either domain. After his second inquiry with the imp, Agboreko begins his divination accompanied by a dirge-man and his acolyte. The refrain which ends each strophe of the dirge indicates, even before Agboreko interprets the message of his oracle, that the dance of welcome will go on. The last strophe is particularly apposite:

> A touch, at the rounded moment of the night
> And the dead return to life
> Dum-belly woman, plantain-breasted
> Mother! What human husband folds
> His arms, and blesses randy ghosts?
> Keep away now, leave, leave the dead
> Some room to dance. (*FP* 40-1).

Part II of *A Dance of the Forests* is designed as the rite of welcome by the dwellers of the forest. Before the Crier summons the forest folk to dance, Eshuoro interrogates Murete about the plans for the forest ceremony. He believes that Aroni intends to let the three human beings continue living, in spite of their guilt, after they have judged themselves and, in a bloody speech, he promises revenge. Aroni does indeed intend to set the trio free after their ordeal, because he and Forest Head look on them as "the lesser criminals. . . Weak, pitiable criminals, hiding their cowardice in sudden acts of bluster" (*FP* 79). The Crier's pompous language in summoning the spirits of the forest to the welcome belies the simple import of his words that only Dead Man and Woman can assume their former corporeal state:

When spells are cast
And the dead invoked by the living, only such
May resume their body corporeal as are summoned
When the understreams that whirl them endlessly
Complete a circle. Only such may regain
Voice auditorial as are summoned when their link
With the living has fully repeated its nature, has
Re-impressed fully on the tapestry of Igbehinadun
In approximate duplicate of actions, be they
Of good, or of evil, of violence or carelessness;
In approximate duplicate of motives, be they
Illusory, tangible, commendable or damnable.
Take note, this selection, is by the living.
We hold these rites, at human insistence.
By proclamation, let the mists of generations
Be now dispersed. Forest Father, unveil, unveil
The phantasmagoria of protagonists from the dead. (*FP* 50).

Soyinka delays the dance of welcome by presenting a longish pantomime set in one of the great African empires--Aroni sarcastically forgets which--for the purpose of establishing the link between the dead pair and the three human actors on the one hand, and their parallel existences in the earlier period on the other.

The play-within-a-play with its evocation of Mata Kharibu's courtly splendour serves a number of ends. It dramatizes Soyinka's postulate about an ignoble past in a fictitious kingdom at the height of African empire. It provides "evidence" for the subsequent "trial" scene. It has the appearance of a comic relief from the nightmarish forest atmosphere which is pervaded by hundreds of spirits. And it visualizes a human situation that parallels contemporary events which Soyinka probably thought wise to veil. Beyond these four functions, the court scene adds another dimension to the human characters and to the themes Soyinka propounds.

The important developments contained in the play-within-a-play are highlighted in a number of revealing speeches made principally by the captain (Dead Man) and Historian (Adenebi), although a few speeches by other characters are also significant. Madame Tortoise (Rola) and the Court Poet (Demoke) make hardly any profound observations, since their importance lies more in the fact that they provide the necessary continuity than in the development of valuable insights. Demoke, in his asides, is primarily a foil to Madame Tortoise for it is quite apparent that he holds her in contempt. His parallel act of violence in Kharibu's court is not a duplicate but a caricature of his killing of Oremole in his subsequent life: the poet's novice goes to the roof of the palace to recover the queen's canary and falling breaks an arm.[23] But Madame Tortoise is much more powerful in the court of Mata Kharibu than in her contemporary role. She not only plays the whore with the soldiers under Warrior (Dead Man) but she tries also to seduce him and have him overthrow his master. It is his refusal and Madame Tortoise's jealousy of his pregnant wife (Dead Woman) that lead to his gelding and debasement to the status of slave.

The plight of Warrior (Dead Man) at the court of Mata Kharibu gives prominence to the petty wrangles of men of power, wrangles that often occasion senseless wars. If his stubborn idealism and atypical insubordination prevent him from being a credible character, they at least serve very well to hammer home the key points of the issue. He "pleads guilty," before Kharibu, "to the possession of thought" which he began to exercise only after receiving his sovereign's unacceptably "inhuman commands." He declares to the Physician of the court that the war Kharibu orders him to fight is an unjust war "merely to recover the trousseau" of a stolen wife whose husband does not consider her worthy of a battle. But his most powerful statement comes when Physician tries to project the consequences of his rebellious action into the future and predicts that he will be labelled traitor by future generations:

> WARRIOR: Unborn generations will be cannibals most worshipful Physician. Unborn generations will, as we have done, eat up one another. Perhaps you can devise a cure, you who know how to cure so many ills. I took up soldiering to defend my country, but those to whom I gave the power to command my life abuse my trust in them.
>
> . . . .
>
> Mata Kharibu is leader, not merely of soldiers but of men. Let him turn the unnatural pattern of men always eating up one another. I am suddenly weary of this soldiering where men must find new squabbles for their cruelty. Must I tell the widowed that their men died for another's trousseau? (*FP* 55-6).

The captain's defence of his position is logical but not pragmatic. It is in the nature of things that ordinary human beings, whom the ants later symbolize during the ritual, are pawned and crushed in the disputes of the powerful and mighty. Warrior dramatizes the savagery of wars by representing them as the cruel practice of cannibalism. To confirm the repetitiveness of war Historian has been diligently searching the records for a precedent to Warrior's "thought cancer." He returns during the scene with this remark:

> HISTORIAN: It is unheard of. War is the only consistency that past ages afford us. It is the legacy which new nations seek to perpetuate. Patriots are grateful for wars. Soldiers have never questioned bloodshed. The cause is always the accident your Majesty, and war is the Destiny. This man is a traitor. He must be in the enemy's pay. (*FP* 57).

Historian's declamation about war is a mordantly ironic assertion in an equally ironic situation. Kharibu seeks to justify his action as a powerful war-monger and to discredit the soldier's stand against the war. Historian endorses both. As a matter of fact, he ironically suggests that war is virtually a boon to patriots and a healthy legacy that new nations like Nigeria in 1960 wish to keep. If it is not either of these, he implies, then why has war been such a consistent occurrence in history? He also suggests that war, as an end in itself marked as it is by unreason, needs no rational causes. On account of this implication, the captain is proved right. Mata Kharibu is merely looking for an excuse to wage war. Kharibu's own concern with historical precedent is matched only by his obsession about the way posterity will judge him. After initiating plans for the war out of whimsy, he is trapped by his own decision and, for fear of losing face, he cannot reverse himself, even when Soothsayer (Agboreko) informs him that there will be much bloodshed "on both sides of the plough" (*FP* 58). He is in fact the earliest model for the title hero-dictator of *Kongi's Harvest* who is completely absorbed in the task of self-deification.

Soyinka seeks to demonstrate the inglorious side of the African heritage through the agency of Mata Kharibu's court. Lurking below all its surface pomp and majesty are disturbing traits, bestial and violent, of human nature: the whoring of Mata Kharibu's queen, the corruption of his Historian, the selling of the soldier and his sixty men as slaves, the machinations of Madame Tortoise against her new lord, and the total lack of feeling and compassion by men of power who engulf their subjects and lesser compatriots in meaningless wars. Because the latent violence of Adenebi, Rola and Demoke affects only a small segment of society, they are the lesser criminals. In comparison, Mata Kharibu and powerful men like him, ancient and modern, are the scourge of humanity because of their absolute and destructive control over countless human lives. Kharibu's unconscionable indulgence in a futile war lays bare another ignoble aspect of the African past and calls in question the exclusive glorification of the traditional African heritage and culture.

Soyinka does not consider a tendency towards violence and a glorification of the past as uniquely African characteristics. They are in effect universal. As an illustration he selects the famous Trojan War which was waged by the Greeks against Troy after Trojan Paris had seized Helen the wife of the Greek Menelaus. It is Historian who draws the parallel for the benefit of the mutinous Warrior:

> WARRIOR: I am no traitor!
>
> HISTORIAN: Be quiet Soldier! I have here the whole history of Troy. If you were not the swillage of pigs and could read the writings of wiser men, I would show you the magnificence of the destruction of a beautiful city. I would reveal to you the attainments of men which lifted mankind to the ranks of gods and demi-gods. And who was the inspiration of this divine carnage? Helen of Troy, a woman whose honour became as rare a conception as her beauty. Would Troy, if it were standing today lay claim to preservation in the annals of history if a thousand valiant Greeks had not been slaughtered before its gates, and a hundred thousand Trojans within her walls? Do you, a mere cog in the wheel of Destiny, cover your face and whine like a thing that is unfit to lick a soldier's boots, you a Captain . . . Your Majesty, I am only the Court historian and I crave your august

> indulgence for any excess of zeal. But history has always revealed that the soldier who will not fight has the blood of slaves in him. For the sake of your humble subjects, this renegade must be treated as a slave. (*FP* 57-8).

The result of putting these words into the mouth of the untrustworthy Historian is to turn the Trojan War into a farce. Historian avers that the war was an example of a grand and heroic event that brought out the best in man. The quality of this speaker's "excess of zeal" in the service of Mata Kharibu is clearly indicated soon after this testimony. In return for a handsome bribe surreptitiously passed to him, he supports the slave-dealer's fable that he has a "new vessel . . . capable of transporting the whole of Kharibu's court to hell--when that time does come" (*FP* 61). He simply cannot be trusted to speak honestly since he is a confounded rogue and an ingratiating servant. A close examination of the speech reveals how sophistical his reasoning is. Briefly summed up the argument is the following: The destruction of Troy was a good and glorious event because its "divine carnage" elevated mankind to godhead and because Troy itself has become immortalized in historical records whereas it would have been obscure if it had survived. Carried to its ultimate conclusion this specious reasoning results in the farcical assertion that the way to achieve fame and immortality is through death and destruction.

There is sinister foreboding in this trend of thought. The argument not only satirizes the fascination that Troy's destruction has had for many writers but it also develops Historian's thesis that war is the destiny of mankind. An augury such as this can have nothing but dark implications for the new nation celebrating independence many centuries later.

Since Greece is considered the ancestral home of Western culture, Soyinka's choice of the war between Greece and Troy as a parallel to the glorification of African empire is far from fortuitous. The many great European writers who have been absorbed in the recounting of the nine-year siege of Troy have almost to a man extolled the valour and courage of both Greeks and Trojans in stories of passion, intrigue, adventure, romance, intrepid warfare and divine involvement. Invariably, Helen of Troy, whose legendary beauty led to the launching of a thousand Greek ships, has been seen as the inspiration and the justification of the long and bitter war. The defence of this and such wars as praiseworthy and uplifting is, however, effectively demolished by Historian's transparent argument in favour of any war.

Soyinka emphasizes the absurdity of war by attributing a quite different motive to Mata Kharibu. The Trojan War had been fought because the Greeks wanted to regain their honour while the Trojans sought to retain their prize. Mata Kharibu insists on fighting even though the dishonoured chieftain does not find Madame Tortoise worth fighting for. Kharibu's excuses are that he must get a dowry for his wife in spite of the special circumstances under which he procured her and that he must not set a precedent by condoning his captain's mutiny. His absurd and indefensible position accentuates his

Historian's ironic statement, which Kharibu does not comprehend, that the cause of wars is always irrelevant. If the satire against war and the glorification of the past is still lost to some, Historian's lament to Physician, that Kharibu's reign will go unsung because the war is not fought, drives the point home unmistakably: "You are a learned man and I would appreciate an opportunity to discuss the historical implications of this . . . mutiny . . . if one can really call it that . . . We were so near to the greatness of Troy and Greece . . . I mean this is war as it should be fought . . . over nothing . . . do you not agree?" (*FP* 62). The dreary portent of inevitable human warfare is attested to because the war is eventually fought and the tribe scattered. Thus, instead of bringing relief from the tense atmosphere surrounding the play the court scene increases its intensity.

The parallel between Kharibu's court and the contemporary scene signifies that as much potential exists now for meaningless violence as there was during the old empires and civilizations of Africa and elsewhere. Soyinka reinforces this theme by making the three human protagonists--Rola, Demoke and Adenebi--foretell the future after becoming masks possessed. The parade of the future and the inquisition of Dead Man and Woman are in contrast with the expected celebration that a ceremony of welcome implies.

Dead Woman is a dazed and lost character, as she was on her first appearance, because she does not comprehend her reception. She has known nothing but suffering since the events in Mata Kharibu's court and can hardly find rest in what seems a strange, unfriendly land. She had apparently committed suicide when Madame Tortoise sold her husband as a slave and so the child she carried in her womb had been lost. She and Dead Man importune the three human protagonists in turn to "take [their] case" and are shocked later to discover intuitively that Demoke, the most sympathetic of the three, is also tainted. Dead Woman asks: "The one who was to take my case--has he sent another down? Into the pit?" (*FP* 26). In such circumstances her return, like her passage since the traumatic events of Kharibu's court, has been one long draught of pain. She tells the Questioner

> My knowledge is
> The hate alone. The little ball of hate
> Alone consumed me. Wet runnels
> Of the earth brought me hither.
> Call Forest Head. Say someone comes
> For all the rest. Say someone asks--
> Was it for this, for this,
> Children plagued their mothers? (*FP* 69).

Forest Head's reply to these words is that "there is no choice but one of suffering " The expostulation and reply indicate that Dead Woman's role is symbolic. She is the Earth Mother--like the two old women in *Madmen and Specialists*--and therefore represents "all the rest" of womankind in the travail of birth. More specifically she is the mother of the Abiku child. Together mother and child symbolize the unending cycle of tragic violence that has continued from past to present and that will be repeated in the future.

Like Dead Woman, Dead Man is disillusioned by his reception.

The Questioner (Eshuoro in disguise) viciously accuses him of wasting the three consecutive lives he has lived since his first existence in the court of Kharibu "when, / Power at his grasp, he easily / Surrendered his manhood" (*FP* 72). Eshuoro cannot appreciate the idealistic instinct of Dead Man which shies away from the corrupting influence of power. In three successive life experiences spread over three hundred years the captain has suffered acutely for his consistent honesty and sense of justice, in the New World where he was sent as a slave as well as in Africa. By vitiating his aims and ideals human society shows itself quite unready for the egalitarian world of justice, truth and goodness to which it consistently pays lip service. "The womb-snake of the world" (*FP* 71), the Yoruba icon of eternal repetition symbolized by a snake for ever eating its tail, is not yet ready to develop the kink that would enable man to escape the evil cycle of repetition. Dead Man is condemned to spend another hundred years of wandering in order to complete his present cycle. But his stubborn hankering after truth is an assurance that there are men, admittedly few, who appear intermittently on earth and who are poised ready to help lift man out of the pit of unreason and evil if there is wholehearted commitment from those who hold sway.

The chorus of the future is best described as a pageant whose underlying theme, the pursuit of what Forest Head calls "the destructive path of survival," is repeated in a number of variations. The three leading human participants are masked and made to speak as spirits of Palm, Precious Stones, Darkness, Rivers, etc. These tell the story of man's eternal greed, dissoluteness, destruction of his environment, of animal and plant life, and of his treachery towards his own kind. It is a story that will be relived in the future. The living tableau of ants symbolizes the waste of human resources, since four hundred million lives have been sacrificed during man's one million years of life on the planet to satisfy the whim and the lust of men of power. The antiphonal recitative of the ants, following Forest Head's question, exposes the barren reasoning that promotes such sacrifice:

FOREST HEAD: Have you a Cause, or shall I
     Preserve you like a riddle?
AND LEADER: We are the ones remembered
     When nations build . . .
ANOTHER: . . . with tombstones.
ANOTHER: We are the dried leaves, impaled
     On one-eyed brooms.
ANOTHER: We are the headless bodies when
     The spade of progress delves.
ANOTHER: The ones that never looked up when
     The wind turned suddenly, erupting
     In our heads.
ANOTHER: Down the axis of the world, from
     The whirlwind to the frozen drifts,
     We are the ever legion of the world,
     Smitten, for--"the good to come."   (*FP* 78).

The ants recite the story of the human paradox in which progress is seen as self-defeating if not retrogressive. The sepulchral foundation of human progress and civilization dooms the fabric of society to destruction because new nation states are built on the sites and with the same fragile pillars, physical and ethical, of old ones. The ants emphasize the ultimate fragility and futility of human endeavour since man never learns from the lessons of the past. The utilitarian principles that are so often quoted when masses of people are sacrificed for "progress," "civilization," "democracy" and "the good to come" are yet another indication of our proneness to self-deception or a make-believe sense of permanence and justice in a cruel and bellicose world.

Another variation on the theme of cyclical destruction and creation involves a set of Triplets--End, Greater Cause and Posterity. These reflect man's specious justification of his acts of cruelty and savagery. The use of rationalistic terms to defend and legitimize selfish and irrational decisions is one more piece of evidence of self-deception and hypocrisy. And because the high moral tone is only a varnish that covers the base intentions underneath, the future will simply be a by-product of a violent past and present.

Aroni was right when he said in his Prologue that the dance of welcome "was not as dignified a Dance as it should be." In order to thwart the ceremony, Eshuoro disguises himself as the Questioner and later as the Figure in Red to involve the Half-Child in a game whose stake is the child's future. His Jester, meanwhile, masks himself as the Interpreter. The two appear successful in sabotaging the inquest over which Forest Head presides as coroner. But Forest Head's equanamity throughout indicates that the basic aim of the proceeding is fulfilled, that is, the attempt to make the humans aware of their pursuit of "the destructive path of survival" (*FP* 79). This awareness is the object of the welcome. And since there is little inherent dignity or praiseworthiness in the core of the past or of the present, and little hope of improvement in the future, the reception cannot emulate the wild festivities of the town, the sounds of which penetrate the heart of the forest.

The forest welcome, then, represents the sober accounting that would be going on in the town if the councillors were not myth-makers anxious to elevate one side of their past while covering up the other equally valid side. Independence is a time for stock-taking and planning for the future, not an occasion for complacent rejoicing and self-congratulation. That the leaders are content with the second can only spell out dark messages for the future represented most prominently in the mime by Abiku.

The ultimate meaning of the mask *motif* in the "Dance of the Half-Child" is as obscure as the future itself. As the custodian who has to decide the child's fate Demoke, the conscious artist, is once again involved in the action. Since Demoke's role is unclear and the symbolism is ambivalent, there have been a number of admittedly speculative interpretations of the ritual.[24] There has, however, been general agreement about the main purpose of the dance, whether the original directions for the "Dance of the Half-Child" are followed or the less elaborate substitution dance for staging purposes: the future will be as bloody and as evil as the past. On the basis of the foregoing reading of the play, Demoke may be seen as the sensitive soul of the community, as the artist who can play a vital role in restoring society to itself through his art and his criticism of society. Since the past is finished and the present has arrived, the domain in which the artist can have the most impact is the future and it is up to him, as Soyinka says of the African writer, to "have the courage to determine what alone can be salvaged from the recurrent cycle of human stupidity."25

In returning the child to the mother who is now mutely soliciting it, Demoke is carrying out Aroni's design to let the future decide its course "by reversal of its path or by stubborn continuation" (*FP* 67). The visionary artist in Demoke forsees that the power of will is not yet strong enough for a reversal of the cycle of destruction which has plagued mankind. He has at any rate been cautioned that the Abiku child, symbol of the future, is a "doomed thing" which he cannot dispense with lightly. Nor does this artist have the transcendental force of will that is required to challenge established powers. The kind of energy necessary, Soyinka makes clear in "The Fourth Stage," is in Hellenic terms "a totality of the Dionysian, Apollonian and Promethean virtues" which enabled Ogun to bridge the gulf of transition. Demoke is himself guilty along with the rest of society. In recognition of his own unreadiness he becomes the Unwilling Sacrifice who cannot fully expiate the sins of society, since, as is made quite clear in *The Strong Breed*, a man must be willing for the ritual to succeed. He falls from the top of his totem in fulfilment of his death wish but he lives on to be wracked by his experiences. He and Rola, whose wish had been to die in the arms of a man, come out of the experience chastened and perhaps regenerated, but their impact on the future is uncertain. Adenebi, for ever living "in mortal terror of being lost" (*FP* 43), is now completely lost--to himself and to us--because he resists the offer to know and acknowledge himself.

Forest Head's final speech is an exercise in godly frustration and despair. He sees his role as a passive one. He is full of knowledge, wisdom and weariness because of the folly of man, a creature dear to him. The painful knowledge of man's persistent course is also his secret burden of responsibility:

> My secret is my eternal burden--to pierce the encrustations of soul-deadening habit, and bare the mirror of original nakedness--knowing full well, it is all futility. Yet I must do this alone, and no more, since to intervene is to be guilty of contradiction, and yet to remain altogether unfelt is to make my long-rumoured ineffectuality complete; hoping that when I have tortured awareness from their souls, that perhaps, only perhaps, in new beginnings. . . .(*FP* 82).

The last words of this speech hold the tiniest glimmer of hope for the future--a wan hope that will be dashed five short years after the "new beginnings" of the Nigerian nation. But Forest Head also strikes at a nerve center, God's efficacy in the face of "long-rumoured ineffectuality." The question of God's very existence will receive increasing attention in Soyinka's later works, from *The Strong Breed* on, where Soyinka's mounting skepticism becomes more and more pronounced.

A Dance of the Forests is Soyinka's Half-Child auguring the future development of this artist. The massive structure and proliferation of themes are never again repeated since Soyinka achieves a mastery over dialogue and psychological motivation that enables him to develop complexity and cohesion with much simpler and more artistically integrated plots and with themes and symbols that have little duplication. The tragic sense of *A Dance of the Forests* is not mirrored in any of the characters but in the situation and this sense of tragedy is weakened by the farcical elements that recur in the play. At the same time, Soyinka exploits with extreme dexterity the symbols and myths of a dual cultural heritage which he uses to bring to our view those menacing monsters of our era that threaten all of mankind with spiritual death and oblivion.

Chapter X

The Road, *Kongi's Harvest*, *Madmen and Specialists*: Masks of Deification and Defecation

I

Soyinka emerges as a mature playwright in *Five Plays*, a volume which displays him exploring a number of themes, developing a technique of plot and structure and acquiring a versatility with language that are amplified and further refined (or deliberately distorted) in the later plays. Already in the bleak worlds of *A Dance of the Forests*, *The Swamp Dwellers* and *The Strong Breed* is apparent the tragic sensibility that governs the later plays. Soyinka could afford, in his earlier career, to introduce elements of gaiety and good humour in such plays as *The Lion and the Jewel* and *The Trials of Brother Jero*; yet even these plays have their share of bitter social criticism and rigorous satire. Early poems like "Telephone Conversation" and "Two in London" exhibit a rather puckish humour, but the underlying issue is the unpleasant but all too real existence of prejudice and racial discrimination. *The Road*, however, presents a tragic and mystical vision of mankind in a universe in which the physical and spiritual interpenetrate. The play underlines the greatness and the futility of a mind that quests for the ultimate knowledge of its spiritual essence while it is firmly yoked to the corporeal and the mundane. The subject of this play, Professor's quest for the Word, is treated partly humorously and partly grimly through well managed dialogue, splendidly realized role playing and the interactions of individually realized characters, many of whom are the object of Soyinka's satire. After this play, which was written, produced and published in 1965 the darkly light and lightly dark vision of the dramatist becomes a permanent grey, full of sinister foreboding and the macabre elements of *auto-da-fé*, as disillusionment with Africa's new leadership becomes complete. In the poem, "Post Mortem," Soyinka himself advocates a love of grey:

> let us love all things of grey; grey slabs
> grey scalpel, one grey sleep and form,
> grey images. (*Idanre and Other Poems*, 31).

Soyinka's espousal of "all things of grey" accentuates the mood of pessimism that permeates *A Dance of the Forests*, a mood that recurs in subsequent plays. The last two of his published plays--*Kongi's Harvest* (1967) and *Madmen and Specialists* (1971)--exhibit a topicality reminiscent of *A Dance of the Forests*. This is not to say that the other plays are lacking in the treatment of contemporary issues. Indeed many features of the contemporary African scene are portrayed in previous plays. The conflict between old and new ways of life is presented in *The Lion and the Jewel* and the actions of a predatory priest in *The Trials of Brother Jero*. Indeed the depiction of corrupt politicians, thuggery and violence, bribery and other forms of vice occur in varying degrees throughout *Five Plays* (with the exception of *The Strong Breed*). In *The Road*, in which Soyinka most artistically realizes the symbolism inherent in the mysteries of Ogun, of possession and of the gulf of transition, these facets of present day society are seen to be commonplace occurrences and are treated with wry cynicism by the men of the road. Still, these examples reveal subthemes for the most part. But in *Kongi's Harvest* Soyinka presents a study of autocracy of a kind that was beginning to manifest itself in the various regimes of independent Africa. The play reflects Soyinka's dislike of Messiahs as well as his distaste for pretence, a distaste which is amply illustrated in his novel *The Interpreters*. The play ends significantly with the descent of the grating which "hits the ground with a loud, final clang" (*KH* 90). The clang symbolizes the swift and violent clamp-down that will take place after the abortive coup organized by the forces of opposition; it signals the end of hope in the foreseeable future just as at the end of *The Swamp Dwellers* the fact that "[t]he oil lamps go out slowly and completely" (*FP* 198) bears witness to a more gradual onset of despair. All these plays were written before the first military coup in Nigeria in January, 1966 and the subsequent outbreak of civil war. After two years in prison during which most of the poetry of *A Shuttle in the Crypt* was written, Soyinka embarked on *Madmen and Specialists*, the chilling scenes of which he sets "in and around the home surgery of Dr. Bero, lately returned from the wars" (*MS* 7). Its grey desolation and almost complete lack of action reflect the aftermath of the war of Biafran secession and the sterility of a progress which, as Baroka of *The Lion and the Jewel* has observed, "[m]asks, unknown, the spotted wolf of sameness" (*FP* 144). Soyinka's distortion of language, too, is a grim metaphor for the mangling of countless bodies during the war, even though no direct references link the "wars" to the Nigeria-Biafra war.

The protagonists of *The Road*, *Kongi's Harvest* and *Madmen and Specialists* may be regarded as case studies. Through them the playwright explores the psychological motivations of singular men who have risen, in their own estimate or in the estimate of those around them, above the level of common humanity. Each of these characters, from Professor of *The Road* to Dr. Bero of *Madmen and Specialists*, is engaged in a singleminded pursuit which is a reflection of his egoism. Since, in Soyinka's world view, human existence follows a pattern of destruction and creation, such men, on account of their elevated status as questers, dictators, religious leaders or warmongers, are shapers of their people's destinies through their actions for good or evil. But given the pervasive sense in Soyinka's work that the forces of evil are in the ascendant, a study of these protagonists becomes a study of the warping effects that a projection of self has on the character and personality of the individual and eventually on the health and welfare of the community.

Now, Soyinka does not deny man his aspirations. Nor does he lack aspirations for mankind. Soyinka, not less than Senghor or Achebe, would like to see all peoples of the world living in peace, harmony and freedom from war. For this reason, he has transcended the bounds of Yoruba cosmology which sees no hope of escape from an unending pattern of destruction to envision a kink in the tail of the self-devouring snake as a possible (but improbable) hope for escape from the self-destructive cycle. But throughout the history of organized society the power to change the course of mankind has been vested in leaders and strong men whose momentous decisions are all too often based on petty interests which serve their self-will rather than on high-minded considerations for the welfare of society. According to Soyinka's view, the paradox of the human condition is that the vast majority of people in society are gullible believers in leaders whom they idolize. On the other hand, the leaders tend to revel so much in the exercise of power that they become preoccupied with power for itself. This preoccupation with power coupled with a growing self-worship invariably leads to notions of godhead and divinity.

Soyinka recognizes the power of will in the human spirit. It is a force in man that helps him to surpass himself. The gods in his Yoruba pantheon are beings endowed with all too human traits, including this force of will. Ogun, in particular, as Creative Essence, not only forged a link with man in order to end the vast gulf of separation between men and gods, but has continued to inspire those acts of will and courage that bring out the best in man. As for man himself, when, as Soyinka observes, he "is stripped of excrescences, when disasters and conflicts (the material of drama) have crushed and robbed him of self-consciousness and pretension, . . . it is at such moments that transitional memory takes over and intimations rack him of that intense parallel of his progress through the gulf of transition, of the dissolution of his self and his struggle and triumph over subsumation through the agency of will."[1] But the power of will is a power for good or for evil. In so far as it is a power for good, the individual penetrates the disintegrating gulf and resists his final dissolution only through an act of will. Even so, the attempt to plunge through the abyss is a hubristic act for which reparation must be made whether the actor is a god such as Ogun, Orisa-nla, Sango or a man. The projection of self resulting in false notions of divinity is, however, an impious attempt to integrate human essence with divine essence. Professor, Kongi and Dr. Bero display, each in his own way, some aspect of this violent portion of the demonic will as the subsequent examination of the works in which they function as actors will show.

II

Professor's search for the Word in the play *The Road* is an ambivalent quest. It may be viewed as simply a quest for meaning or, since it is a quest for the essence of death, it may be considered as an attempt to seek immortality through the conquest of death itself.

In his search for meaning Professor examines the only certainty in mortal existence, the certainty of death, in a bid to find the key to its mystery. In one of his pronouncements, for instance, he declares that "the Word may be found companion not to life but Death" (*RO* 11). Thus if death is meaningless and without any essential purpose, life itself becomes trivial and worthless unless some rationalization suggests a future existence for which life and death are merely a prelude.

In his quest for meaning Professor represents the perennial instinct in man which longs to justify and explain the complex world he lives in and his place in it. Characteristically, man tries to probe the foundation of his existence and to project meaning and relevance onto life. In the process, he has reached out to the supernatural world which gods and spirits are thought to inhabit because physical forces alone do not sufficiently explain the ultimate value of his existence. Professor may seem at first to strike a discordant note. But the greatest barrier to a contemplation of earthly life as a totally rewarding and meaningful experience is the purposeless waste of countless human lives through war, disaster or some other circumstance. In *The Road* Kotonu, the driver turned salesman who manages Professor's "Aksident Store" with its boast "All Part Availebul" reflects on his and Samson's narrow escape from death. He is at a loss to understand why the people in the lorry that overtook them after an accident at the bridge were killed while they were spared. In his search Professor goes beyond the circumstances of life such as this to investigate the nature of death. If he can understand its secret he will be able to fulfil an intellectual yearning for knowledge.

The discovery of death's secret would be a key not only to knowledge but also could lead to an extension of life's meaning through an extension of mortality into immortality. Such an undertaking, however, is a perilous course fraught with dangers, since it is an attempt to bridge the gulf of transition and become united with godly essence. *The Road* is in fact prefaced by a poem, "Alagemo" which alludes to the dissolution of the flesh that occurs when a person passes from physical to spiritual essence. The poem prefigures Professor's sacrilegious attempt to recreate out of turn the dance of "Agemo" which had been suspended when Murano the mask-wearer was struck down by Kotonu's lorry in another road accident. As Soyinka explains in his prefatory note, "For the Producer," this final dance of the play "is the movement of transition . . . used in the play as a visual suspension of death--in much the same way as Murano, the mute, is a dramatic embodiment of that suspension" (*RO* vi). Soyinka elaborates thus on the role of Murano in the rite of transition:

> He functions as an arrest of time, or death, since it was in his "agemo" phase that the lorry knocked him down. Agemo, the mere phase, includes the passage of transition from the human to the divine essence (as in the festival of Ogun in this play) as much as the part psychic, part intellectual grope of Professor towards the essence of death."
> (*RO* vi).

Professor's quest for the Word seems to go beyond the desire for knowledge to a yearning for self-deification. His exertions in this direction are the subject of study in the play. They are framed within a frozen moment of time and history. Consequently, his stopped watch "still tells the time" (*RO* 38). The events of past, present and future time merge within this limbo (which reflects the gulf of transition) to the extent that the episodes appear to be unco-ordinated events in an elaborate Absurdist vein. The enigmatic Word itself which Professor describes as elusive is "[t]rapped. Fast in demonic bondage" until its kernel, "the slumbering chrysalis of the Word" (*RO* 45), can be forced to crack. But Professor's search for it only among rejects, abandoned scraps of paper, newsprint, and the like, indicates a topsy-turvydom in which hierarchical values are reversed.

This reversal of values is inherent not only in his quasi-religious search for the Word among abandoned words but also in Professor's association of the Word with death. Such an association contrasts with the fundamental Christian belief according to which Christ is seen as the Saviour who represents the Way, the Truth and the Life throughout eternity. It is also opposed to Yoruba teaching which holds that life or force is present in all nature and in the supernatural. Thus in terms of his philosophical pursuit Professor's assumptions are the opposite of established religious belief whether Christian or traditional African. He has been ousted from the church and has set himself up just outside its stained windows. He flutters midway between the practices of the church and the beliefs of Yoruba religion and culture.

In its exposition of Professor's quest and in its underlying implications *The Road* is the most mask-bound play that Soyinka has written. It is a play that is more thoroughly grounded in Yoruba lore and especially in the mysteries of Ogun than most of the other plays in the corpus. It is true that Ogun never appears as a character in the way that he does in *A Dance of the Forests*; but his impact is even greater in *The Road* because the dramatic invocation of the god through the agency of Murano is more in keeping with Yoruba belief. In spite of its steeping in tradition, one of the most remarkable qualities of this play is the unobtrusiveness of the complex philosophical ideas that are contained in it because even the most baffling episodes and statements are resolvable within the play's framework and development.[2] Alternatively, these perplexing features of the play can be put down to the enigmatic nature of Professor's character and quest. In blending the many themes and scenes of *The Road* artistically together, Soyinka has succeeded in creating a remarkable piece of theatre. The play is satisfying in itself even if little or no attention is given to the profoundly serious insights that underlie this superficially humorous and dramatically intense play.

Although the ambitious plunging of Professor towards knowledge and immortality is of paramount interest in *The Road*, it is effectively obscured by a plethora of mundane events and episodes ranging from the predicament of Kotonu and Samson to the identity of Murano or, on another level, from the actions of external characters like Say-Tokyo

Kid, Chief-in-Town, the customers of the "Aksident Store" and the corrupt policeman Particulars Joe to the exploitation by Professor of his minions. Talk of his quest dominates the action but little meaningful progress in the tracking down of the Word, or, for that matter, in developing his avocation of forgery seems to take place. His first appearance in the play with the signpost "BEND" under his arm, his subsequent preoccupation with the "cabalistic signs" of a discarded football coupon that he treasures above the food it is used to wrap and finally his offer of his bundle of faded scraps of paper as assets that he will contribute to form a syndicate with Kotonu and Samson do not convince us that he is pursuing a creditable objective. Instead, as in this brief speech at the beginning of Part Two, the religious sounding quest is mixed with concern about goods for the store: "You neglect my needs and you neglect the Quest. Even total strangers have begun to notice. Three men sought me out on the road. They complained of your tardiness in re-opening the shop." (*RO* 55).

In his dealings with the men of the road under his charge Professor is a vicious and selfish character. When he is not actually stealing their money he is busy exploiting their plight by reducing them to servitude. In this connection, he effectively robs Kotonu of the will or the ability to take up driving again by exposing him to scenes of violent death which only deepen his abhorrence of driving and by attempting to convert his licence to a forged licence for the driver-trainee, Salubi. But even more, Professor has sinister designs to exploit the "rejects of the road", as he calls them, since he plans to use them as pawns in his play for possession of the enigmatic Word. They can provide clues to the Word by becoming the victims of violent and meaningless death on the road.

In Part Two, the account of Samson's and Kotonu's experience first at the bridge and then at the drivers' festival explains their presence at the shack throughout the play and their helplessness as servants of the manipulative Professor. But as the "two tormented devils" (*RO* 75) who are his "patients" their subservience falls far short of Murano's. The mute never speaks a line in the play but for all this his importance in the climactic developments is unquestionable. He is the first character to appear in the pre-dawn setting at the beginning of the play and as the play develops we are given bits of information about his function as Professor's minion tapster. The mystery surrounding him gradually lifts, however, and we later come to realize that he is the mask-wearer whom Kotonu knocked down with his lorry while his frenzy of possession was mounting during the Ogun festival. Professor has kept the mute captive in the hope of discovering the secret of the gulf of transition if and when the mute's tongue is loosened. But as he indicates to Kotonu and Samson, this is a vain hope since the possessors of the Word "know what they are doing" (*RO* 45). He therefore exhorts them to "beware the pity of those that have no tongue for they have been proclaimed sole guardians of the Word. . . . They have pierced the guard of eternity and unearthed the Word, a golden nugget on the tongue. And so their tongue hangs heavy and they are forever silenced." (*RO* 44).

The characters in *The Road* are either predators or victims or both. Professor is the arch predator exploiting all his dependants. But the men of the road are often predators in their own right. Kotonu, for instance, is afraid of becoming a sacrificial victim to the road. In his function as the manager of Professor's store he accepts, however half-heartedly, the role of predator himself. Perhaps even more explicitly Say-Tokyo Kid, who is something of an antagonist to Professor, assumes the role of predator as leader of the gang. He feels that he is protected from the ravages of the road as a son of timber but he is nonetheless resigned, unlike Kotonu, to the possibility of violent death on the road--as long as he is crushed by solid timber instead of by some third-rate wood. Each in his own way, Chief-in-Town and Particulars Joe represent the corrupt and violent world of politics and government that lies beyond the shack. Professor has however no control over Chief-in-Town who, as the type of the vicious politician, is an exploiter himself.

Soyinka brings the characters who frequent Professor's bar vividly to life through splendid dialogue and role playing. The many dialects that reflect the characters' outlook range from Professor's semi-biblical language and manner through Say-Tokyo Kid's cowboy lingo and the pidgin of the touts to Yoruba, used principally in the songs and dirges. Thus the quester's antiquated dress ("Victorian outfit--tails, top-hat etc., all thread-bare and shiny at the lapels from much ironing," *RO* 8) is out of keeping with the earthy setting of the shack and prepares us for the anomalies in his speech. We cannot take his histrionics seriously on account of his confusion of road-signs and signposts to the Word, the marks on useless football coupons and mystical symbols, faded bits of paper and treasury bills. Say-Tokyo can boast that he does not "give a damn for that crazy guy," Professor who, one of these days, is "gonna go too far" (*RO* 25) and almost in the same breath state his belief that "there is a hundred spirits in every guy of timber trying to do you down cause you've trapped them in" (*RO* 26). Particulars Joe is able to assume his prosecutorial pose when he accosts potential bribe victims and abandon it when he is smoking hemp with Tokyo and his gang or when, caught with Samson's coin he blandly acknowledges his "error" saying, "That's O.K. Natural mistake on my part. Money has been left for me in more unlikely places believe me." (*RO* 74-5). In his reminiscence about perished drivers, in his role in the accident with Murano and in his present stint as Professor's store manager, Kotonu stands revealed as a sensitive and sorely tried individual who is totally denuded of the will to act. Samson, his mate, prefers to believe that he has himself grown away from traditional beliefs like those held by Say Tokyo but he demonstrates how much he is intuitively bound by them in his constant nagging of Kotonu:

> When other drivers go out of the way to kill a dog, Kotonu nearly somersaults the lorry trying to avoid a flea-wracked mongrel. Why, I ask him, why? Don't you know a dog is Ogun's meat? Take warning Kotonu. Before it's too late take warning and kill us a dog. (*RO* 19).

As the only character who is on the scene virtually all the time, Samson keeps the business of the play, to utilize his road language, "moving on greased wheels" (*RO* 77) through his dynamic role playing.

Samson's role playing, like much of what happens in *The Road*, has an ambivalent quality. His early masquerade as a millionaire does not only expose his own secret longings and cynical sense of humour. It also has thematic value in the casual endorsement of vice and corruption as well as structural impact since Professor accepts, and later attaches symbolic meaning to, his "error" in losing his way. During the follow-up scene to this episode as millionaire Samson relives a moment of conflict between Professor and the bishop. This portrait of the church, in the words of Salubi, as "high society" discredits both the church as organized religion and Professor as erstwhile pillar of that community. It prepares the way for Professor's admission that he "left the church coffers much depleted" as well as for his later depiction of his blasphemous teaching on Palm Sunday. Samson's re-enactment, with Professor and Kotonu, of the bridge accident and the accident with Murano similarly emphasizes the play's theme of violence and its fluid structure of piecemeal revelation. Another incident, Kotonu's frenzied donning of the mask is exciting theatrically and thematically as it images Samson's unintentionally agitated impersonation of Sergeant Burma which in turn anticipates the final dance of possession.

The dance of possession is the climax of the action in *The Road*. The celebration of the dance represents the blending of religious elements in traditional culture and Christian doctrine as well as the violence inherent in technological society. As a portent of the dance, Kotonu's wearing of the mask at Samson's urging is a desperate attempt at self-preservation since the celebrants at the Ogun festival probably would have avenged the sacrilege against their god by taking the lives of Kotonu and Samson. Professor's deliberate ordering of the dance is, by comparison, a desperate gamble by which to unearth the secret of death, a secret that is beyond the limits of man's knowledge. Professor combines, in his exploitation of the dance, the widely held African belief that a god becomes manifest during the transitional dance of possession and the Christian belief in the power of the Word made flesh. In the play, these two principles operate within the context of the road. The road is not only the preserve of Ogun but also represents the process of technology in the development and use of the machine, in the impact of technology and its machines on the environment and in the violent destruction of lives through accidents.

Soyinka focuses on the violent and the predatory in his use of the road as symbol and setting. On the realistic level, the world of drivers, touts and thugs is so well realized that the drama of their lives, as portrayed in the play, becomes satisfying entertainment in its own right. The only anomaly in this road setting is Professor, in his dress and in his concern with the "word business" as Samson puts it. Yet, on this realistic level, even he enjoys a measure of justification because of his spare parts enterprise and his forgeries of drivers' licences. The violence of the roadsters' way of life is also well documented through direct reporting and role playing. The reactions of these men to the impact of the road on their lives varies from Say Tokyo's fatalism to Samson's plea, "May we never walk when the road waits, famished." (*RO* 60). This prayer which is echoed in "Death in the Dawn," a poem in the section "Of the Road" in *Idanre and Other Poems*, identifies the role of the road as symbol in the play.

Samson's personification of the road is echoed by Particulars Joe when, in reply to Professor's question about the god he pretends to worship, he answers "Same as the other sir, the road." (*RO* 85). But, despite the emphasis on its character as predator, the road is not a fixed symbol. It is changeable as Professor observes in his expatiation on the relationship between his road and the Word:

> It is true I am a gleaner, I dare not be swayed by marvels. Stick to the air and to open earth, wet my feet in morning dew, gleaning loose words from the road. Remain with the open eye of earth until the shadow of the usurping word touches my place of exile. But I broke my habit. I succumbed to the flaunting of a single word, forgot that exercise of spirit which demands that I make daily pilgrimage in search of leavings. I deserted my course and--rightly--I lost my way. That was the vengeance of the Word. . . . But don't we all change from minute to minute? If we didn't we wouldn't hope to die. Well, same as the road. My favourite paths are those trickles among green fastnesses, on which forests are broken up--between the falling dew and the evening mists the nature of those paths changes right beneath my feet. (*RO* 85-6).

In this speech there is a blend of the realistic and symbolic attributes of the road as pathway and as predator. As pathway the road is the physical road that we tread, specifically the motor road that transports goods and people. But it is also the trajectory of Professor's quest and (if we take into account the ideas expressed elsewhere in Soyinka's work) a medium of the benefits and scourges of civilization. Evidence of its changing character is inherent in its role as predator claiming victims from the spoil. This dominant function is linked with the typology of the road as the preserve of Ogun, god of War and Guardian of the Road. The road's symbolically rapacious nature is reinforced by reference to the spider's function as a similarly vicious predator trapping victims in its artistic web of destruction. Professor's speech confirms that, conceptually, the road is inextricably linked to the quest for the Word in the world of the play.

Professor Eldred Jones begins a discussion of *The Road* with the observation that "There will probably always be some question as to the ultimate value of whatever it is Professor finds at the end of his search for the Word in *The Road*."[3] Jones later concludes that Professor has found the incommunicable essence of death for himself in death and that everyone must similarly find it for himself. But Soyinka does not believe that all men have this discerning quality. Nor is Professor a representative quester charting a path that Everyman must follow. He has rejected orthodox values calling them an illusion of the Word. He seems to think that the beaten path has, apart from many theories and controversies, brought forth no startling revelations about the meaning and extension of life into eternity. His aim, therefore, is to achieve the positive by pursuing the negative: to find life through death, meaning through unmeaning, value through rejection. In the face of the love of such contraries in established religion, there appears to be a depth of reason in the height of Professor's madness.

His opposition to hierarchical values also explains his attitude towards the castaways at his shack. He exploits them and the rejected words that he gleans equally in his search for the essence of death. For this reason he wants the assurance that their lives will end in meaningless death. Professor is therefore understandably furious with Salubi who keeps talking about suicide which is a deliberate and purposeful act. And he does nothing, either, to hide his regret that none of his men has died in the motor accident. In a travesty of the crucifixion, he recounts an accident in which three souls were crucified and fled up a tree, significantly in a passage where he also remarks that "the Word may be found companion not to life, but Death" (*RO* 11). But he also reveals that the Word can be found "Where ascent is broken and a winged secret plummets back to earth" (*RO* 45). Consequently, when he hurries to the wrecks of vehicles he is not interested solely in spare parts for the store but also in arresting the flight of the souls of the newly dead in order to pluck from them the secret of death-and-life. As a result, his taking and treasuring of the road sign from the scene of the accident is not the product of sheer eccentricity as it seems at first sight; nor is his replanting of the sign as if "he was Adam replanting the Tree of Life" (*RO* 21). These actions are all part of his intellectual striving after the Word as essence of death.

The search for the Word is so important to Professor that he is not content to stop at necromancy or at the total exploitation of his servants. He goes beyond all these to imprison a god in suspended animation with a view to extracting from him the priceless secret of mortality. The evening communion which parallels the Christian one in the adjacent church is a pseudo-religious ritual through which he expects to obtain some fulfilment of his goal. His libertinism is indicated in his teaching to the children on Palm Sunday. Ironically, in his groping towards death's true face he affirms the principle of life through the symbol of the palm. But he is no Messiah come to die that others may live. He would rather have others die that he may live. When all else has failed he has but one last resort, the final most heinous act of sacrilege, that is, the repossession by Ogun of the mute Murano. He declares:

> So, surely Murano, crawling out of the darkness, from the last suck of the throat of death, and Murano with the spirit of a god in him, for it came to the same thing, that I held a god captive, that his hands held out the day's communion! And should I not hope, with him, to cheat, to anticipate the final confrontation, learning its nature baring its skulking face, why may I not understand . . . (*RO* 90).

Professor's knowing sacrilege illustrates his insatiable desire to gain knowledge of death vicariously through the newly dead or through the medium of a god's possession. Because of his excessive vanity he must pay for his sin with his life. Say Tokyo Kid, his antagonist, thus becomes the agent of retribution in the final moments of the play.

In her book, *Long Drums and Cannons*, Margaret Laurence has made this pointed observation about Professor's vainglory: "Professor, at the end, is mad in a way that is universally comprehensible and for which no better term has ever been found than *hubris*, the self-pride of the man compelled to try to know what only the gods may know, to be in fact a god."[4] Laurence's remark, in the same context, that the Word may not even exist is an avowal of the paradox inherent in the quest.

If the Word does exist, then Professor's inverted search for it among rejects implies that it will not, indeed cannot, be found in orthodox religion. If it is non-existent, one is forced to conclude that the value of human life is fully contained within life itself and there are no profound secrets to be found in death. This finite limit to human existence can only emphasize the futility and the waste of millions of lives that are denied completion and fulfilment by the predators of the world. Man's egoism has led him to believe that, owing to his special eminence in the universe, he cannot be confined to earthly life like all other creatures. Soyinka is skeptical about this hope of eternal life especially since its proponents are frequently predatory priests exploiting the common man's capacity for belief. Man's innate depravity and violence is another factor that cries out against his elevation to immortality in a spiritual life. Whether the Word is "*Ashe*, 'the Power of the Word' in Yoruba belief" as Gerald Moore supposes[5] or the Word made flesh in Christian religion, the stoic acceptance of suffering and meaningless violence as a prerequisite for a better after-life or a re-incarnated existence can do little to alter the path of man's uncertain destiny. But Professor's egoism is the extraordinary insolence of the man with a will to power and knowledge. He seeks immortality on this side of death and is reluctant to concede that the secret of the Word is unattainable or non-existent. He tells himself "I must hope, even now. I cannot yet believe that death's revelation must be total, or not at all." (*RO* 93).

The benediction that Professor offers his followers at the end of the play returns us to the typology of the road: "Breathe like the road, be even like the road itself." (*RO* 96). This is an appropriate farewell because it affirms the division of human beings (and the whole cycle of nature) into predators and their victims. The road itself, which is usually viewed as a symbol of progress, wreaks violent havoc on man, the inventor, caught in the web of his own creation, the machine. The inventiveness is a tribute to Ogun, the smith god, but so is the rapine, since this god, not only as god of War but also as king of Ire, is steeped in slaughter and gore. Sango, the "neo-technic ancestor" whom Soyinka views as the "tragic actor for the future age"[6] is a vengeful god who is not above preying on his own kith and kin. But his ministers, too, are profiteers who use the myth of the lightning stone to exploit their credulous victims. For its part, the ravages of the Christian religion are epitomized in the destruction of drinking shacks like Professor's and in his excommunication as a heretic.

Professor's complex personality represents a major advance in Soyinka's development of character. It is instructive to view him as a composite of two earlier protagonists, Brother Jero and Eman, no less than as kindred with Kongi and Dr. Bero. Jero's vicious exploitation of members of his flock in *The Trials of Brother Jero* is overshadowed only by his ambition to become the "Velvet-hearted Jeroboam. . . . Immaculate Jero, Articulate Hero of Christ's Crusade" (*FP* 210)--an elevation for which he is patently unsuited. His longing for sainthood is surpassed by Professor's yearning for knowledge and godhead in *The Road*. Eman of *The Strong Breed* is uncertain of his own desire for meaning although he engages in a life-long quest. His death, like Professor's, surrenders little that can confirm our belief in the value of human life. Moreover, a recognition of the atheistic tone of this play can lead to an appreciation of the much subtler skepticism of *The Road* which is a genuine inquiry into the substance and shadow of belief. Professor's own inordinate desire for the power of knowledge, however, is less devastating than the savage propensities of Kongi and Dr. Bero who have modern weapons of war at their command.

III

The theme of harvest in Soyinka's works does not have the conventional associations of fruitfulness and happiness in the midst of plenty. Invariably the harvest is a barren and gloomy event instead of one that brings expected wealth and joy. Such a gloom echoes a spiritual dearth which must be removed from society before a fruitful harvest can be reaped. The sombre harvest of Igwezu in *The Swamp*

Dwellers is typical of this plight of society. After having been exploited by his twin brother in the city, Igwezu returns to his village to find an equally disappointing return from crops that were his last hope. His exposure of Kadiye, the well-fed priest, as an impostor who has grown fat on the people's flesh and blood, is the action of a man who has lost practically everything including his belief in religion and his capacity for hope. The harvest at the end of *The Strong Breed* concludes on a similarly disturbing note. The ritual cleansing that the elders anticipate is reversed and Eman's self-sacrifice as carrier seems to be wasted on a community who, as his father has predicted, cannot make good use of the sacrifice of a member of the strong breed. The harvest in *Kongi's Harvest* is, true to form, a dismal affair, since Kongi, the despotic president of Isma, is bent on stifling the people's cultural life and on replacing it with cant and repression.

Soyinka has labelled Kongi's state the republic of Isma on account of the regime's fondness for isms[7] and its exaction of blind allegiance from the people. The regime's propagandist machine is absorbed in image-making through the exploitation of the news media. Communication is in one direction only, since the "government rediffusion sets" "talk and talk and never / Take a lone word in reply" (*KH* 2) while the "penny newspaper" rants off a "harvest of words" (*KH* 1). Thus Kongi's rule is marked by barren words and vicious police action rather than by consultation with the people and by concerted action.

Soyinka's fascination with the trend towards dictatorships in the newly independent states of Africa during the nineteen sixties must have prompted the depiction of Kongi's rule. Autocrats like Kongi, when they become obsessed with their newly-found power, not only strive to destroy their enemies, real and imagined, but soon also become aloof and cut off from their people. The play treats of Kongi's modern regime; however, in the sections concerned with traditional rulers, the play is rooted in African tradition, especially in the elaboration of concepts concerning the feast of the New Yam, in the extensive employment of proverbs and in the ritual of the king's dance.

In an invaluable essay Oyin Ogunba makes the following comment on the structure of the play:

> In *Kongi's Harvest*, the design is that of a king's festival, especially a Yoruba king's festival. The king in Africa is still God's deputy on earth and so he combines both spiritual and political functions. Hence his festival is not a private celebration but one that has meaning for the whole community and in which everyone is expected to participate with interest. As the first citizen, the ideal figure around whom the whole tradition is woven, the king's dance is the dance of the community by its divine leader, a re-enactment of the whole living tradition of the people. It is thus a life-giving ritual which has to be done in epic style to demonstrate the higher aspirations of the community.[8]

The dance that Oba Danlola and his retinue perform in the introductory "Hemlock" section of the play seems to have this royal quality. These words from the praise-song, sung by Oba Sarumi, pay tribute to the might and majesty of the king:

Oba ni i f'epo inu ebo ra'ri
Orisa l'oba
Oba ni i f'epo inu ebo r'awuje
Orisa l'oba.

None but the king
Takes the oil from the crossroads
And rubs it in his *awuje*
The king is a god. (*KH* 3).

These lines stress the spiritual authority of the oba when he annoints the head's pulse centre with the oil of sacrifice, as well as his power as a god. But the oba now has only the trappings of royalty, since he is in detention after being stripped of his political power by Kongi. The regal dance is therefore sheer make-believe, as we discover when the Superintendent stops the dance by grabbing the wrist of the lead drummer. Danlola exhibits his resignation to his loss of power when he says:

> My friend, you merely stopped
> My drums, but they were silenced
> On the day when Kongi cast aside
> My props of wisdom, the day he
> Drove the old Aweri from their seats. (*KH* 4).

The drums which sound now have a hollow ring since the real drums which symbolize power have been snatched from the oba by President Kongi. In the play, the dance of the king, with all its pomp and majesty, is a reminder of the departed graces of traditional authority to which the obas hark back nostalgically. The abrupt ending of the dance brings a jolting return to reality.

Oba Danlola is a realist whose first rule of combat, according to his servant, Dende, is "always outnumber the enemy" (*KH* 69). Since he is hopelessly outnumbered and outclassed by the forces of Kongi he has accepted defeat on the political level. But Danlola refuses to relinquish his spiritual and symbolic authority over the people which is what Kongi wants. He is in detention for declining to serve Kongi the New Yam instead of presiding over the ceremony and eating the Yam himself.

The Feast of the New Yam is an indispensable ritual of celebration in traditional black Africa. It is the feast of the new year and therefore celebrates the renewing cycle of nature. In those areas where yam is grown as the prime crop, this king of crops, as it is called in *Things Fall Apart* symbolizes the supremacy and power of the clan. As symbol of harvest, the yam embodies the fertility of the tribe and guarantees its continued procreation through harmonious interaction with nature. In addition, as an occasion of cleansing, the harvest festival symbolizes the purgation of the clan's sins and the restoration of its commonweal through the medium of its spiritual head. The New Yam festival is consequently no light matter. It lies at the heart and soul of the community and imposes an onerous burden of responsibility on its divine ruler. Whoever presides over such a feast therefore has the life of the community in his hands.

The dispute between the factions of Kongi and Danlola reminds one of a similar conflict in Achebe's *Arrow of God* over the announcement of the Feast of the New Yam. As the Chief Priest of Umuaro, Ezeulu delays for two lunar months the announcement of the feast because his absence from the clan has prevented him from carrying out his ritual eating of two of the sacred yams. This delay precipitates a famine in the clan, a disruption of its harmony with nature and its capitulation to the forces of Christianity. Unlike Danlola who early concedes defeat, the demented Ezeulu is overcome in his struggle with forces that are either within his own clan or in the uncomprehending white administration. *Kongi's Harvest* deals with the classic conflict between religion and politics that led, some centuries back, to the cleavage between church and state in Western Europe. In the African context, Soyinka portrays the ineluctable sacrifice of tradition on the altar of modernism.

On account of Oba Danlola's sense of the doom of traditional culture, we become witnesses, from the very beginning, to the passing of a way of life. But although the forces of Kongi will prevail in the end, the death of tradition will be a disaster for the new nation since the wholesale abandonment of traditional culture will mean ridding the state of good as well as bad customs. As Oba Sarumi points out at the start of a dirge which is sung traditionally when a king dies

> They complained because
> The first of the new yams
> Melted first in an Oba's mouth
> But the dead will witness
> We drew the poison from the root. (*KH* 7).

In his despotic rule Kongi will not be prepared to risk danger and encounter suffering on behalf of his people in either word or deed. In fact he personifies the poison in the body politic. In contrast with the life-giving qualities that a spiritual ruler incorporates, he heads a reign of terror and unnatural developments that will be totally at odds with the spirit of harmony which he professes to invoke. The disharmony is already suggested in the sentiments expressed in Oba

Danlola's final chant of the dirge of *ege*, sentiments that predict the impending blighting of tradition:

> This is the last
> Our feet shall touch together
> We thought the tune
> Obeyed us to the soul
> But the drums are newly shaped
> And stiff arms strain
> On stubborn crooks, so
> Delve with the left foot
> For ill luck; with the left
> Again for ill-luck; once more
> With the left alone, for disaster
> Is the only certainty we know. (*KH* 10).

Kongi's newly shaped drums do not beat a harmonious rhythm since the leader is preoccupied with power and divinity as ends in themselves. His Reformed Aweri Fraternity is a part of his propagandist machine. Soyinka unsparingly satirizes these New Aweri in their use of bombast to mask their vacuity. Although they pretend to spurn their predecessors' "glamourised fossilism" (*KH* 24) their own so-called "Enlightened Ritualism" is patterned on the policies of the Old Aweri. In spite also of their rejection of proverbial wisdom in favour of "ideograms in algebraic quantums" (*KH* 13) which they themselves do not understand, their petty squabbling is a far cry from the image of "positive scientificism" which they claim will dominate their pronouncements. Since they are hollow men bandying words about, it is fitting that they envision themselves, in self-contradictory terms, as "youthful elders of the state" and as "a conclave of modern patriarchs" (*KH* 12). They are in fact simple-minded stooges of Kongi who view their image of themselves as Magi as "one step to his inevitable apotheosis" (*KH* 11). For, not content with usurping Danlola's role as God's viceroy on earth, their master, Kongi, wants to be a god in his own right.

The barren hypocrisy of Kongi's Messianism is open to view as he operates from his cell in a mountain retreat on the eve of the festival. He is supposed to be fasting and meditating as Isma stands on the threshold of its second Five Year Development Plan. But the image of total harmony which he is busy setting up for the state has been disputed by the recent bomb-throwing attempt on his life. Kongi's pretentious posing for "Last Supper" portraits instead of engaging in earnest meditation betrays the fictional foundation of his mission which the Secretary helps him fabricate:

> SECRETARY: It's all part of one and same harmonious idea my Leader. A Leader's Temptation. . . . Agony on the Mountains. . . . The loneliness of the Pure. . . . The Uneasy Head. . . . A Saint at Twilight. . . . The Spirit of the Harvest. . . . The Face of Benevolence. . . . The Giver of Life . . . who knows how many other titles will accompany such pictures round the world. And then my Leader, this is the Year of Kongi's Harvest! The Presiding Spirit as a life-giving spirit--we could project that image into every hear and head, no matter how stubborn. (*KH* 39).

The fabrication of images that are to be forcibly projected into the minds of the people reveals the regime's lack of creative ideas and its reliance on brute force.

Professor of *The Road* tries unsuccessfully to achieve godhead through a ritual of possession and the unlocking of the secret of the Word. In *Kongi's Harvest*, Kongi assumes the mantle of divinity without the ritual of investiture and proclaims himself the Spirit of Harvest.

Unlike him, Danlola, the lecherous old realist, never forgets that he is yoked to the corporeal, a yoking that he symbolizes in an excremental image (*KH* 4). Kongi, however, is so far gone in self-conceit and in delusions of immortality that he is ready to change the course of the world. In his pitiless satire of the man Soyinka exposes Kongi's approval of a new calendar that will date from the current harvest. Kongi's rejection of his Secretary's nomenclatures which omit Kongi's name in favour of the unambiguous "Kongi's Harvest" (KH) and "Before Kongi's Harvest" (BKH--"No need why we should conform to the habit of two initials only" *KH* 37) is typical of a self-love that seeks self-proliferation.[9]

If Kongi were to enter into the true spirit of harvest, he would endorse those principles and practices that proclaim life and abundance. But he merely disguises his treacherous, unforgiving and murderous spirit by assuming the posture of a Messiah and of a benevolent life-giver. His hypocritical proclamation of a reprieve for the men condemned to die for the attempt on his life, when he fully intends to have them hanged, goes beyond his reputed "flair for gestures" (*KH* 30). It characterizes the bloodthirsty tyrant who preys on his own people. His convulsions, like those of a god possessed, actually bring him down from his pedestal to his true level of impotent humanity. Oba Danlola is right in picturing Kongi as the son of the crow which feeds on carrion. Because Kongi is so rapacious, the only way he can regain his composure is through the exercise of "scientific exorcism" as Fourth Aweri calls the slaying of the condemned men. In the circumstances, the repressive measures of this regime are not very far from the dismal world of *Madmen and Specialists*.

While Oba Danlola falls under the weight of Kongi's repression Daodu, his nephew and heir, is quietly involved in a scheme to oust the dictatorial Kongi. Even Danlola, fooled by Daodu's calm exterior, describes him as "Lately returned from everywhere and still / Trying to find his feet" (*KH* 54). In fact, Daodu has his feet planted in the soil and his yam will easily win in the competition for the prize yam at the New Yam Feast. Ironically, however, his prize yam is a monster, "a most abnormal specimen" (*KH* 72) for, while the fertilizers and the labour are his the soil is still Kongi's.

In *Kongi's Harvest* Soyinka presents Daodu as the antithesis of Kongi. The contrast between the two men is dramatized in the stage set by the juxtaposition of scenes. In the First Part, Kongi's ascetic mountain retreat is worlds removed from the gay atmosphere in the night club scene where Daodu consolidates his opposition to Kongi by joining forces with Segi. Segi calls Daodu her Spirit of Harvest but, in a reference to Kongi Daodu tells her resignedly "I hate to be a mere antithesis to your Messiah of Pain." (*KH* 46). Instead he would like to fight Kongi with his own weapons of hate and destruction. The litany in which Daodu and Segi take part lays bare the dangerous effects of the will to power:

DAODU: Let me preach hatred Segi. If I preached hatred I could match his barren marathon, hour for hour, torrent for torrent. . . .

SEGI: Preach life Daodu, only life. . . .
DAODU: Imprecations then, curses on all inventors of agonies, on all Messiahs of pain and false burdens. . . .
SEGI: Only life is worth preaching my prince.
DAODU [*with mounting passion.*]: On all who fashion chains, on farmers of terror, on builders of walls, on all who guard against the night but breed darkness by day, on all whose feet are heavy and yet stand upon the world. . . .
SEGI: Life . . . life. . . .
DAODU: On all who see, not with the eyes of the dead, but with eyes of Death. . . .
SEGI: Life then. It need a sermon on life . . . love. . . .
DAODU [*with violent anger.*]: Love? Love? You who gave love, how were you requited?
SEGI [*rises*]: My eyes were open to what I did. Kongi *was* a great man, and I loved him. (*KH* 45).

Segi, a modern version of Madame Tortoise in *A Dance of the Forests*, is privy to the warping effect that absolute power has had on a once loved, once great man. Since Kongi has been corrupted by the lust for power she wishes to steer Daodu towards positive goals that uphold life.

Daodu's speech at the festival is made with the assurance and the vigour of a Conquering Hero. Fully confident that Kongi will be overthrown by the time the oba presents the sacred yam and before Kongi makes his marathon speech, Daodu speaks as a Saviour at the Second Coming. In contrast with the asceticism of the First Coming he declares "This trip I have elected to sample the joys of life, not its sorrows, to feast on the pounded yam, not on the rind of yam, to drink the wine myself, not leave it to my ministers for frugal sacraments, to love the women, not merely wash their feet at the well." (*KH* 79). Daodu will not subscribe to the false asceticism of Kongi. As Redeemer he unequivocally preaches libertinism instead as he contemplates the

Ismites' liberation from the barren hold of the autocratic Kongi. Although he implies that he is a true Messiah he obviously considers Kongi a false prophet, a "Jesus of Isma" who is a harbinger of death. The foiling of the plot against Kongi demonstrates that, Daodu's assurance to the contrary, it is not such an easy matter to depose an established ruler, especially one, like Kongi, who runs a police state.

One issue on which the New Aweri seem to reach a consensus is that Kongi's rule is "part of a normal historic pattern" (*KH* 20). Nations and empires rise and fall, cultures reach their apogee and decline, the strong overpower the weak. For the present, Kongi is entrenched in power but the promise of greater repression after the aborted Bacchanal will not wipe out opposition to his oppressive regime. The doctrine of Inevitable History dictates that Oba Danlola cannot hold on to power indefinitely. No more can Kongi, as long as there are those who have the will and courage to oppose him and eventually to expose him to the people for what he really is. His discomfiture when Segi serves up the head of her father in a platter as the orgiastic harvest feast becomes nightmare brings home to him the stark reality of his diabolical regime.

According to the world view of *Kongi's Harvest*, Oba Danlola, Kongi and Daodu represent defunct, entrenched and challenging orders of power respectively. Oba Danlola, the wily and dilatory reactionary, is the traditional chieftain who has ruled his people with an absolute power which lies more in the paraphernalia of custom and taboo than in the exercise of brute force. He now knows that he and others of his breed are "the masquerade without / Flesh or spirit substance" (*KH* 53). But this realization of the loss of political and spiritual power does not deter him from resisting the nullification of his function or from indulging in make-believe pomp and majesty. Kongi, the autocrat, has inverted the old order of communal sharing and responsibility in which the individual's actions for good or evil have repercussions on the body politic. Under his coercive and unimaginative rule the people have the support of their traditional beliefs taken from them. Instead they are subjected to propaganda and brute force which win their allegiance through fear rather than through trust. Daodu, the quiet revolutionary, is impatient with the ritual and slow dignity of traditional authority and abhors the image-making and the unproductive terrorism of the present government. Although he adopts the productive tools of the modern world he fails to recognize that he must also respect the soil of tradition in order to produce a normal harvest. Success in the future will depend on the just matching of tradition and modernism, not on the elimination of one by the other.

Although the three characterize differing and conflicting interests, Danlola, Kongi and Daodu are afflicted, in varying degrees, by much the same syndrome of power. Soyinka considers true humility and generosity as the indispensable counterparts of power and greatness.

The besetting sin of greatness is that it all too often gives rise to an overdeveloped ego with manic propensities. Intimations of immortality are the direct result of a mania which causes the subject to lose touch with reality. Soyinka denounces this overblown sense of divinity in the oba who inherits it with the rest of traditional culture as well as in Kongi and in Daodu who exhibit traits of Messianism. Kongi's affliction is the most advanced as, through his actions, the playwright demonstrates that notions of omnipotence and divinity can reduce a man to quaking impotence.

Soyinka employs the scatological sublime as a weapon against the exaggerated egotism of men of power. Because of his awareness that excretion is a bodily function "which spares neither king nor god" (*KH* 4), Oba Danlola's culpability is perhaps mitigated. But Soyinka suggests in *The Interpreters* that Voidancy, as he labels the doctrine of excrement, can itself be attitudinized into human and divine categories. Nonetheless, Soyinka castigates those power-mongers whose self-worship makes them forget their base origin or their humanity. Perhaps the most eloquent attack on the vaunting of self in the plays is the query Old Man makes on behalf of ordinary human beings in *Madmen and Specialists*:

> And even if you say unto them, do I not know you, did I not know you in rompers, with leaky nose and smutty face? Did I not know you thereafter, know you in the haunt of cat-houses, did I not know you rifling the poor-boxes in the local church, did I not know you dissolving the night in fumes of human self-indulgence simply simply simply did I not know you, do you not defecate, fornicate, prevaricate when heaven and earth implore you to abdicate and are you not prey to headaches, indigestion, colds, disc displacement, ingrowing

> toe-nail, dysentery, malaria, flatfoot, corns and chilblains. Simply simply, do I not know you Man like me? (*MS* 72).

Soyinka's fascination with manifestations of self-deification goes beyond the personages involved. Ultimately it is the very idea of divinity and Messianism that he questions and satirizes. In the dancing that accompanies Kongi's Bacchanal, the first half of the accompanying song describes a lack-lustre First Coming in which "The foolhardy hedgehog / Was spreadeagled on nails" (*KH* 82). Kongi projects on himself the ascetic image of a Messiah at his First Coming which contrasts with the merriment and abandon of the Second Coming. Daodu espouses this Second Coming. But prophets of agony or prophets of joy, Messiahs for Soyinka have never been able to redeem man from himself by altering the destructive course he has been pursuing throughout history. That none of the disputants in the conflict emerges as unquestioned victor is evidence that the past, present and future orders which the three represent are in essence little different from one another. Kongi is simply using brute force to achieve what the obas accomplished through religious hypnotism. Thus the chilling spectacle of the decapitated head at the end of the play reflects, like its biblical analogue the head of John the Baptist, the brutality of Kongi's autocracy. It is also a portent of things to come.

IV

Soyinka's prediction that the cycle of human violence would continue unbroken into the future was unhappily fulfilled by the outbreak of the Nigeria-Biafra war. Detained for his alleged sympathy to the Biafran cause, he spent almost two years in solitary confinement while the war raged on. In the years since his release Soyinka has spoken and written about the origin of the war, the depravity of the power seekers who perpetrated atrocities on innocent victims like himself and the hypocrisy behind overtly magnanimous gestures of reconciliation.

It is perhaps to be expected that Soyinka's first literary work after he regained his freedom was a play based on the experience of the war of Biafran secession.[10] This play, *Madmen and Specialists*, was ready for production in the summer of 1970, less than a year after his release. Publication took place the following year. A volume of poetry, *A Shuttle in the Crypt*, followed in 1972. Soyinka also wrote an autobiographical account of his experience during the war in *The Man Died*, 1973. This was followed by his second novel, *Season of Anomy*, 1974.[11]

The circumstances surrounding his summary arrest and imprisonment without charge as well as the treatment he received during his imprisonment provided Soyinka with valuable insights into the character and mind of a number of officials who served during the hate-filled period of the war. Although there are overlapping incidents in the four works concerned with the war, it seems that the play, *Madmen and Specialists*, depicts in the character of Dr. Bero the most coherent portrait of a high-ranking officer who imagines that he is already in the inner sanctum of power. The exercise of power begets illusions of omnipotence as the powerful seek to demonstrate their control over their victims. The need for such demonstrations, however, derives from the insatiable lust for power itself and often reveals equally well the self-doubt, the ultimate impotence and the loneliness of those who try to control the lives of others.

One of the most deeply felt losses of the solitary confinement ordered by the military rulers was for Soyinka the loss of human contact and the intense impact of this loss on the psyche. His personal struggle against self-annihilation was waged with will power expressed through self denying phases of fasting. His alternate moods of indulgence and self-denial are paralleled in *Madmen and Specialists* by Old Man's own moods and by his capacity for self-disgust (*MS* 55). A number of incidents from real life, like the Visit of the First Lady to the Home of the Disabled and General Gowon's wedding also parallel events in the works which contain some of Soyinka's most personal and most persuasive declarations that reveal an unflagging dedication to justice and morality.

Although it owes its origin to the traumatic experience of war, *Madmen and Specialists* is a play of ideas rather than of action. Whatever conflict there is exists in the mind of Dr. Bero. It is centred in his own concern with the significance of the new doctrine propagated by his father (but not explained to his satisfaction) and in his indecision, however temporary, over the liquidation of his father who stands as the only witness to his humanity. In its exploitation of several ideas about human destiny, culture and history Soyinka's use of themes parallels his concerns in *A Dance of the Forests*. In the earlier play there is a struggle between Ogun and Eshuoro over Demoke and his desecration of Oro's sacred tree, but while these gods display anthropomorphic qualities, scant verisimilitude and an unresolved conflict undermine the play's tragic significance. In view of the fulfilment of some of the playwright's worst fears for independence it is not at all surprising that the atmosphere of *Madmen and Specialists* is pervaded with grim cynicism and apathy on the part of the mendicants no less than with a sense of futility and purposelessness. The story of the play, summarized in the return of Bero from the wars to a dutiful sister who becomes disillusioned and with a father whom he feels it his duty to kill in his new profession of intelligence specialist, operates on a plane of obvious and unforced finality. This sense of finality divests it of the climax of suspense and high drama that, say, *The Road* has. Only the macabre humour of the mendicants redeems the bleak and dreary climate of the play.

In *A Dance of the Forests* there is a play-within-a-play in which Warrior (the dead man of the modern scene) makes the following declaration to a passive Physician:

> Unborn generations will be cannibals most worshipful Physician. Unborn generations will, as we have done, eat up one another. Perhaps you can devise a cure, you who know how to cure so many ills. I took up soldiering to defend my country, but those to whom I gave the power to command my life abuse my trust in them. (*FP* 55-6).

Madmen and Specialists takes this proposition to its logical conclusion in a mordantly satiric portrait of violence as an ingrained characteristic of human nature and human society. Apart from its formulation as a philosophy and indeed as a religious catechism, this doctrine of violence as a symptom of the barbarism inherent in human civilization is a brutal crystallization of the castigation of man's persistent and injurious folly through the ages. There was some ambivalence about violence in the creative-destructive symbiosis represented in the mysteries of Ogun in that play, the idea that Ogun and the artist Demoke as well as man and nature generally have to destroy in order to create and create in order to destroy. In *Madmen and Specialists* this dualism is virtually extinct. Instead, people like Bero change from an occupation which heals the ills that threaten life to one which destroys, maims or takes the meaning out of life. Even the old women, who, as earth mothers, are connected with the renewing cycle of life and with healing powers, declare that plants may be good but one cannot tell with seeds (like Bero); their work of considerable labour in the gathering and storing of herbs at the instigation of Si Bero for her brother's medical practice after the war is finally destroyed by their own hands at the end of the play. Despite the dearth, in *Madmen and Specialists*, of creative essences that have been progressively stifled from *The Swamp Dwellers* and *The Strong Breed* through *The Road* to *Kongi's Harvest*, there is a striking similarity in some fundamental themes in the first and last published plays of Soyinka, a similarity which suggests that his bitter experiences of the war including the harrowing solitary confinement of nearly two years strengthened rather than weakend his distrust of human nature.

Aafaa, Goyi, Cripple and Blindman are the mendicants who, as the play opens, are gambling away parts of their already mangled bodies. They have organized themselves into a performing group begging for alms. Blindman shakes a rattle which also serves as collection box for alms. Cripple drums with his crutches while he does the lead singing. Goyi who is partly paralyzed does a single acrobatic trick and Aafaa "tunes up" his St. Vitus spasms for the benefit of passers-by. Their performance is directed mainly toward Si Bero who has no love for them. They are in fact hanging around the surgery and home of Si Bero and her brother because they were commissioned by Bero himself to bring back his father in a clandestine operation and then to spy on the movements of Si Bero. They therefore accept the job of sorting out the herbs that Si Bero gathers under the supervision of the two old women, Iya Agba and Iya Mate. As the madmen of the play their mad dialogue and interaction betray an uncanny foundation in or association with reason. Their words make ideational if otherwise irrational connections with events and situations outside the immediate context. This drift of conversation after Si Bero has given them work to do on the herbs telling them how to go about the task is fairly representative:

AAFAA. Yes, we know.
GOYI. First the roots.
CRIPPLE. Then peel the barks.
AAFAA. Slice the stalks.
CRIPPLE. Squeeze out the pulps.
GOYI. Pick the seeds.
AAFAA. Break the pods. Crack the plaster.
CRIPPLE. Probe the wound or it will never heal.
BLINDMAN. Cut off one root to save the other.
AAFAA. Cauterize.
CRIPPLE. Quick-quick-quick-quick, amputate!
BLINDMAN *lets out a loud groan.*
AAFAA. What do you mean, sir! How dare you lie there and whine?
GOYI. Cut his vocal chords.
AAFAA. "Before we operate we cut the vocal chords."
BLINDMAN. That's only for the dogs.
CRIPPLE. Your case is worse. You are an underdog. (*MS* 20).

The exchanges start out innocently enough with the herbs the mendicants have to sort out. The action of peeling, slicing, picking and breaking soon gives way to Aafaa's "Crack the plaster" which is a re-interpretation of "Break the pods." The dialogue veers in a different direction as the association with plastic surgery is explored. Blindman acts the part of victim and more sinister implications are developed with the inhuman ripping off of the "patient's" vocal chords just because he dares to groan with pain. The manipulation of the terms "dogs" and "underdog" is only another instance of the exploitation of words in the language of the madmen of the play.

Beyond their immediate selves as casualties of war the mendicants represent common humanity imaged as ants trodden under foot in *A Dance of the Forests*. Here the masses are pictured in Aafaa's new nomenclature as "the Ultimate Sacrifice to As, the eternal oblation on the altar of As" (*MS* 52). Piecemeal accounts are given by the mendicants of their excruciating experiences in the war which led to their disabilities and to their encounters with Old Man at the rehabilitation centre for the disabled. They had assisted Old Man at the centre and he had succeeded in warping their minds with the exposition of his doctrine of As which they endorsed and help expound to Si Bero on Bero's arrival at the home surgery. In their acting of various roles they also depict the attitudes and frame of mind of persons like Bero and Old Man who were in charge of major operations frequently unrelated to surgery. In their acted roles as victims of such operations, they show the same morbid self-destructiveness they had exhibited in gambling away their remaining vital parts at the beginning of the play. Their acceptance of suffering and their resigned passivity as the human sacrificial victims of causes espoused by disdainful self-indulgent leaders, who become the capricious gods of their destiny, are in keeping with Soyinka's view of gullible humanity.

The old women are largely responsible for the mysticism inherent in *Madmen and Specialists*. They have contributed their inherited and experiential wisdom to the collecting of herbs for Bero's surgery. Si Bero has taken their work on trust unaware that her brother will become the antithesis of his former self and exploit the good work for evil ends. The earth mothers had warned Si Bero that "this gift is not one you gather in one hand. If your other hand is fouled the first withers also" (*MS* 75). Bero wryly comments on his arrival that "We've wetted your good earth with something more potent than that, you know" (*MS* 28) in response to his sister's pouring a libation with palm wine for his safe return; later he uses the poison berries picked in ignorance by his sister to tempt their father to commit suicide "like a certain ancient Greek you were so fond of quoting" (*MS* 61). He thus confirms his earlier assertion that things from his former vocation will be needed in his present work. The old women rightly demand reparation just as Si Bero feared they would when they realize that Bero is exploiting their good deeds for his own questionable ends. They offer to help Bero cure the old man when they know he is sick but he not unexpectedly rejects their offer because all he wants is to "cure" his father of the secrets he may still have concerning the essence of As. They tell him that his mind has wandered farther than the truth and warn him it is foolish to look for names for the cult they practise:

> IYA AGBA. You want the name? But how much would it tell you, young man? We put back what we take, in one form or another. Or more than we take. It's the only law. What laws do you obey? (*MS* 58).

Bero's only law is the law of the gun which for him is a symbol of absolute power. He has transplanted himself from a base in which he combined the healing power of herbs known to local herbalists with his formal training and experience as a surgeon for the benefit of the people in his community to a new power base for the control and exploitation of men's lives. He tells the Priest, a former patient whom his father used to call the "mitred hypocrite," that Old Man still persists in his attempt to legalize cannibalism. Bero succeeds in ridding himself of the Priest by following his personal word as a scientist that human flesh is delicious with an invitation to dinner. The situation is grimly ironic for Si Bero takes it as a supreme joke only to be shocked into consciousness by her brother's pitying look and cruel reaffirmation that his statement about the deliciousness of human flesh is literally true. Bero evidently considers his eating of human flesh as the ultimate test of strength through the conquest of inhibitions and the first step on the road to power. (*MS* 36). Nonetheless he is under the illusion that he has now reached the fountainhead of power and that anyone who has not like him eaten the flesh of human victims lives in a tiny little world. His endorsement of cannibalism has logical relevance in Soyinka's formulation of As. As Old Man rightly observes, however, "Once you begin there is no stopping. You say ah, this is the last step, the highest step, but there is always one more step. For those who want to step beyond, there is always one further step." (*MS* 49). Because his father represents the last reminder of his humanity Bero has to be rid of him. His action is yet another step in the unending grope towards power. The death of Old Man is thus seen as one of the inevitable by-products of the play's internal logic.

The Old Man does not appear at all in Part One. Accounts of his doctrine are therefore presented at second hand by Bero himself who seems to forget his initial discomposure and vomiting when he learns from Old Man about the human flesh they have eaten. Early in Part Two Aafaa, one of the mendicants, attempts to set up an alphabetic nomenclature for As. The names he selects are instructive: Acceptance, Blindness, (crippled and crippling) Contentment, Divinity and Destiny, Epilepsy, Farts, Godhead. The naming stops at "H" (Humanity) for the philosophy of "As" is founded on the principle of human expendability. Man has consistently accepted blindly and somewhat contentedly a destiny that is conditioned by the fitful and capricious decisions of individuals that he has helped elevate to imagined roles of divinity but who are made of the same common stuff and subject to the same natural impulses as the common man whom they contemn. Old Man plays on the foibles of these so-called men of power and successfully demonstrates the depths of their inhumanity to them. Soyinka selects as the medium of this demonstration the theoretical notion that all carnivores including man kill other animals for their food; since man kills so many of his own, it is reasonable to eat some of this obviously rich food to avoid the immense wastage. The proposal is absurd and will not hold up under searching scrutiny since animals do not usually kill *their own kind* for food. But Old Man establishes the logic of the proposal after the fact and confuses the already warped minds of his hearers by surrounding his postulate with the trappings of a religious credo that is a nicely edited version of the second part of the *Gloria Patri*: "As Was the Beginning, As Is, Now, As

Ever Shall Be, World Without." (*MS* 73).

It is ironic that Bero and the other specialists expect the creed of "As" to be much more profound than it really is. Old Man simply demonstrates the utter barrenness of their cult of power by giving it an equally barren credo. But the specialists have gone beyond the truth and cannot recognize the vacuity of their cult of power. The inconclusiveness of the creed symbolizes the ultimate meaninglessness of their struggle for power. Bero's father effectively cuts them off from salvation by bringing home to them the full recognition of their transgression against their fellow men although he knows that they are too far gone in their lust for power to retract and do penance. The specialists search in vain for a vindication of their action and for their inaction with reference to unfulfilled election promises, including community development schemes, as well as their atrocious acts in the form of executions and torture. In a new formulation by Soyinka they seek to make the end justify the meanness of the means they employ by enshrouding their atrocities in ponderous metaphysics. Significantly, Old Man's creed does not have an end even though it has a beginning, since the lust for power once started is insatiable. Bero's attempt to drag the secret out of his father is bound to fail simply because there is nothing new to be learnt about the irrational philosophy of As. As is simply the first word of a meaningless catechism which operates on a cyclical pattern of foolish violence which has dogged man's existence from the beginning.

Towards the middle of Part Two of *Madmen and Specialists* Aafaa, describing the origin of his spasms, tells of the instantaneous disappearance during the war of six men who were kneeling in prayer in front of him. He has a fit, as it were, possessed by the spirit and Old Man mockingly asks whether or not there were revelations or inspired pronouncements when he exclaims "God! What a way for the spirit to mount a man." (*MS* 54). The irreverent analogy is one of the many allusions to religion in the play. These allusions include Aafaa's reference to the blackmailing of "one Christ into showing off once in a while" (*MS* 44-5) and Old Man's remark that unlike the current perpetrators God had a reason for the Flood even though it was a "damnable" one (*MS* 64). Beyond these instances one comes face to face with the devaluation of specifically Christian symbols and articles of faith notably in Old Man's creed of As and Aafaa's biblical portrayal of priesthood (echoing St. John I, i) in which he maintains that in spite of repeated schisms what he calls the spiritual and political priesthoods had maintained their unity in the process of corresponding movements up and down, backward and forward for, according to the play's logic, "two parts of a division make a whole and there was no hole in the monolithic solidarity of two halves of the priesthood" (*MS* 73).

What this means is that there is no intrinsic disparity between religious and political hierarchies: they are headed by the same type of men raised from the same common clay like the rest of humanity and these men develop a psychotic lust for power and a desire for immortality which are ultimately self-destructive but which also destroy innocent victims in their paths. It is significant that Bero's perspective on his position makes him see himself as omnipotent and others as impotent. Notice the equation of "disabled" and "de-balled" in the language of the play. In Old Man's most important statement on As, not only the broadly spiritual and political but also all other subsidiary manifestations are subsumed under the catch-all umbrella of As:

> As Is, and the System is its mainstay though it wear a hundred masks and a thousand outward forms. And because you are within the System, the cyst in the System that irritates, the foul gurgle of the cistern, the expiring function of a faulty cistern and are part of the material for re-formulating the mind of a man into the necessity of the moment's political As, the moment's scientific As, metaphysic As, sociologic As, economic, recreative ethical As, you-cannot-es-cape! There is but one constant in the life of the System and that constant is AS. And what can you pit against the priesthood of that constant deity, its gospellers, its enforcement agency[?] (*MS* 72).

According to the syncretic language of much of the play and of this speech man is a rat (this recalls Soyinka's idiosyncratic "Rem Acu Tetigisti" earlier in the play) in the rut of a diseased System. Old Man, in the final scene, attempts to demonstrate the method of the specialist for dealing with dissent and in shooting him down Bero merely confirms the repressive measures used by the regime he represents which is for the first time demonstrated in a live performance in the play.

The world of *Madmen and Specialists*, grim, terrifying and out of joint, is so ambivalent that one is not quite sure whether or not

Old Man's frenzied role playing as specialist would have ended in his performing to the quick on the cripple. It is one of the play's disturbing imponderabilia if the actions and attitudes in the play are examined rationally. But the play depicts a world composed of specialists and victims gone mad. In terms of the play's symbolic meaning, the fact that a rationale is lacking for the slaughter reflects on the uncertain fate of the crippled masses of people who are at the mercy of despotic rulers. The rulers themselves vainly seek to justify their senseless violence and caprice which they frame into religious sounding credos. Soyinka's grim satire on the present state of the world is made poignant by Old Man's modest proposal that, as a conservationist measure, officers and the rank and file of the army begin to eat the flesh of the war victims. The mad logic of the proposition that the army sup on humanity, "the favourite food of As" (*MS* 51) is put in perspective by the blatant unmeaning of the doctrine of As. The meaninglessness of As, however, exposes not only the military leaders and healers like Dr Bero who has now become an executioner, but also the incompetence and corruption which led to the ousting of civilian leaders. As a doctrine, the creed also travesties orthodox religion.

In a major speech by Blind man Soyinka also satirizes the covetousness which reveals itself in the tenacious clinging to power by individuals, in the proliferation of economic and political dominance by corporations and political parties and in the perpetuation of colonies by powerful nations. Soyinka's stage directions require that the speech *be varied with the topicality and locale of the time.* The original speech he writes for Blindman makes topical allusions to the old colonial powers, to the new regimes of Africa, to class and race prejudices and, in the reference to Katangese, to the armed struggle in the former Belgian Congo which parallels the Nigeria-Biafra war in the clash of big power interests:

> It was our duty and a historical necessity. It is out duty and a historical beauty. It shall always be. What we have, we hold. What though the wind of change is blowing over this entire continent, our principles and traditions--yes, must be maintained. For we are threatened, yes, we are indeed threatened. Excuse me, please, but we are entitled to match you history for history to the nearest half-million souls. Look at the hordes, I implore you. They stink. They eat garlic. What on earth have we in common with *them*? Understand me, please, understand me and do not misinterpret my intentions. The copper is quite incidental. . . . (*MS* 69-70).

The speech parodies former British Prime Minister Harold MacMillan's "wind of change" pronouncement, in the nineteen fifties, on approaching independence for colonies in Africa. It is no accident that Soyinka allots this speech to Blindman. In his functional role as a man without vision Blindman symbolizes the blind passions and policies of powerful men who torture or eliminate the few questioning men in society who dare to challenge their leaders' actions. In his final role in the play Cripple represents this breed of questioning men. He therefore becomes, in the eyes of leaders whom the rest of the mendicants temporarily represent, a "HOLE IN THE ZERO OF NOTHING" (*MS* 76), "a dog in dogma raising his hindquarters to cast the scent of his individuality on the lamp post of Destiny" (*MS* 73). But the questioning voice cannot be stifled indefinitely. This voice has always questioned and will continue to question the historical beauty and necessity of internecine wars waged by world powers out of rivalry or, like the Nigerian Civil War, backed by the technological weapons of these powers for their own self-interest. Soyinka satirizes the leaders of developing nations like Nigeria who, in pursuit of their self will, seem to be striving to match, "history for history to the nearest half million souls," the violence rather than the virtues of Western technology.

The bizarre, indefinite setting of *Madmen and Specialists* is an indication that Soyinka does not confine himself to Nigeria in his satire of power-seekers engaged in war: the civil war in Nigeria was, after all, only one of the many wars of mankind. In the play there is, however, no customary kink which offers the hope of an escape from the evil history of man, no organized revolt and no spreading of the "thought cancer" contracted by Warrior in *A Dance of the Forests*. Such a vision is reserved for Ofeyi, the central character of Soyinka's second novel, *Season of Anomy* (1974). Ofeyi is offered the duties of Custodian of the Grain, a task that has symbolic significance like the work of the old women in *Madmen and Specialists*. The indefinable nature of the office signifies that the business of growing the grain of harmony and justice in the soil of a chaotic, exploited land cannot be carried out by following a cut and dried formula. Thus Ofeyi accepts that "selective assassinations" must complement the education of the people about their betrayal by members of the all-powerful Cartel. The "Dentist" who propounds this theory of selective violence, of "extraction before infection" (*Season of Anomy, p. 92*) leaves to the visionary the task of replacing Cartel members thus eliminated.[12] A judge's total loss of self-possession, self-pride and dignity when he knows that he is marked for execution by revolutionaries because he has prostituted his office is distasteful to Ofeyi. The judge's conduct makes him lament the fact that present-day leaders, unlike kings of the African past, surrender their pride and self-respect rather than relinquish power. Soyinka further illustrates that new power-mongers like Chief Batoki who exercise raw power and ruthlessly repressive measures against their people are often impotent and execrable creatures in their own homes. If he can have his way, Soyinka wants to see, after the present season of anomy, a re-organized society in which the economic strangle-hold by private, national and international interests will be terminated.

Soyinka's sanguine disgust with corporate exploitation of the masses is like Senghor's distaste with bankers and diplomats in *Chants d'ombre* and *Hosties noires*. President Senghor no longer denounces these exploiters in his two most recently published volumes of poetry. Instead he continues to espouse the cause of peasant folk of all races in *Elégie des alizés* (1969). He has the black peasants particularly in mind when, employing the three colours of traditional Africa, he salutes their "red blood," their "white toil" and their "black joys." Senghor acknowledges that he has left the pastures of Negritude unwatered for seven years adding, in an apparently self-defeating statement, "so that Vision may be born / And that the human race may prosper" (*Elégie des alizés*, p. 19). Although the note of complaint against Europe for its exploitation of Africa is gone, the regret and longing for the Childhood Kingdom remain in this elegy and in the subsequent volume of poetry, *Lettres d'hivernage* (1973). The poet still senses within him his divided loyalties between Europe and Africa represented by Isabelle (Europe) and Soukeina (Africa). In spite of the fact that Senghor constantly plays with colours in *Lettres d'hivernage*, the "Dame" of this last volume is evidently his Princess of Belborg, the *Signare* whose proposed union with the poet posed a threat to his political career in *Ethiopiques*. Because he has his Norman wife in mind, the mask imagery which permeates "Chants pour Signare" is absent from Senghor's *Lettres d'hivernage*. Senghor is once more the romantic lover whose passion has mellowed with approaching age. Still, even when he draws upon modern technological culture the images in these poems, far from reproducing the violence and destruction which were evident in *Hosties noires*, romanticize a lover's agony:

> Yes, yes, yes indeed we have the white telephone
> No, red telephone. Satellites that revolve around the Earth-Mother
> Are they turning but what's the difference? Through black star-studded
>   spaces
> Through the walls the sinews the blood, through the mask and through
>   death
> We have the telephone of the aorta: ours is an indecipherable code.
> (*Lettres d'hivernage*, p. 31).

Senghor's characterization of his Negritude in *Elégie des alizés* as "trowel in my hand" and as "lance in my grip" (p. 17), is more in keeping with the theme of much of Achebe's writing since the civil war than the romanticism of Senghor's latest poetry. In his novels Achebe charts the course of progressive moral decline that Ibo society in particular and African society in general underwent during the colonial period and in the first few years since independence. He turned to poetry as a medium of creative expression during the Nigerian Civil War which sapped his mental and physical energies. *Beware Soul Brother* (1971) is the result of this new venture. A poem from this volume, "After a War," speaks to the problem of resuming normal life after the violent physical and psychic dislocations of war:

> After a war
> we clutch at watery
> scum pulsating on listless
> eddies of our spent
> deluge . . . Convalescent
> dancers rising too soon
> to rejoin their circle dance
> our powerless feet intent
> as before but no longer
> adept contrive only
> half-remembered
> eccentric steps. (*Beware Soul Brother*, p. 20).

In another work, *Girls at War and Other Stories* (1972), two new stories --"Civil Peace" and the title-story "Girls at War"--reflect the exploitation by its own members of an ethnic group either under seige or during the attempt to find its feet again in an aftermath of war. The sense of moral decay is conveyed through the change in Gladys, who is eventually killed during an air raid. Gladys' path crosses at several points during the war with that of Reginald Nwankwo, an official at the Ministry of Justice, who becomes a witness to the changing attitudes in the girl. At the start of the war Gladys was a firm believer in the revolution and a thorough examiner at a Biafran road-block. Two years later, this girl, one of many, has become a black marketeer involved in currency exchange and is obviously kept by an army officer.

Achebe gave full support to the Biafran cause even though he did not undertake combat duties. He is now reconciled to the failure of the revolution and is concerned with the work of rehabilitation and reconstruction. He shares the revolutionary spirit with Senghor and Soyinka, but it is a spirit that these writers have applied to different causes at different times. Senghor espoused the revolutionary doctrine of Negritude during the period of colonization. It was a doctrine that attempted to turn on its head the superiority complex of the Caucasian towards the Negro. Like other poets of Negritude, Senghor has emphasized the glory of the African past, the black man's culture, his divine lineage and the contribution he can make to a world culture. This poet sees Negritude as a doctrine which undergoes change and therefore which must be reformulated constantly, rather than as a dogma which must be surpassed as Sartre warned in "Orphée noir."[13] Achebe's function as a revolutionary may be construed in three phases. The first phase is the education of the young Africans about the values of their past, a past of which they can be truly proud. During this initial stage only, Achebe was sympathetic to many of the claims of Negritude.[14] The second phase depicts the process of disintegration in the old society when external forces alter its structure and values. The third phase sees the castigation of the moral bankruptcy that is apparent in the new society following the withdrawal of external forces. Soyinka's revolutionary zeal is directed towards this last task. Impatient with the glorification of the past and with the process of the African's moral decline, he has consistently unmasked the latent violence and the unbridled corruption of modern society. He does not see the present state of human society as the deterioration of a noble past but as the result of an uninterrupted pattern of human intransigence, senseless passsion and avaricious self-indulgence. These acts of folly lead to dangerous confrontation bloody struggle and unjust exploitation of the masses in society. What makes the present state of affairs different from previous situations is that man's technology poses a real threat of human self-annihilation.

In addition to being revolutionaries in different contexts, Senghor and Soyinka are visionaries. Senghor's vision is expressed through a humanism that seeks to forge cultural links notably between Europe and Africa. Senghor envisions a cultural compromise, a blending of the best elements from each culture which will take place after the imbalance in the perception of African and European values has been rectified. Senghor, perhaps unrealistically, extols culture above politics and economics instead of perceiving the three as complements to each other. The value of African culture to Soyinka is apparent in his fashioning elements selected from Yoruba cosmology into a cogent literary ideology. His literary vision for African society is that this society will be liberated from domination by oligarchs who keep the majority of the people in misery, oppression and want. Although Achebe's vision for the future of African society has not been explicitly set forth in his work so far, his ideal African society, like Senghor's, is one that combines the best in technological culture with the spiritual and moral values of traditional culture. The dream Soyinka's visionary has in *Season of Anomy* is "a new concept of labouring hands across artificial frontiers, the concrete, affective presence of Aiyéró throughout the land, undermining the Cartel's superstructure of robbery, indignities and murder, ending the new phase of slavery" (p. 27). This is an echo of Soyinka's own vision which is, in the final analysis, little different from Senghor's or Achebe's.

The conflicting ideologies of these three writers have obscured not only their common African inheritance but also their common aspirations for African society. Although he has criticized the other two writers for dwelling on the past, Soyinka's belief that the African writer must provide a vision for the future is shared by Senghor and Achebe. Senghor may be ill-equipped to serve the present revolution as a poet of nostalgia and self-abandon in the Childhood Kingdom; however, over a decade ago he set forth his views on a future African socialism in his treatise, *Nation et voie africaine du socialisme* (1961). As a doctrine based on the black man's cultural values Negritude has, like it or not, surrendered its pre-eminence to economic and political realities. In Senghor's most recently published poetry the African masks and statues have become ornamental statuettes in a garden or as "masques polis" (*Elégie des alizés*, p. 19) they watch over the red desk in the poet's study. Although tragic irony is the dominant note in his work

Achebe, like Soyinka, has turned to satire to expose the ills of modern society. His masked fathers, the *egwugwu* who used to sit in judgment over clan disputes, have long departed and even now, as a "Penalty of Godhead" (*Beware Soul Brothers*, p. 45) household gods are left to perish in an abandoned hut. In the midst of war, too, the masks, sacred and profane vanish, replaced by helmets for the soldiers and their mothers soup bowls for little boys. Soyinka the moralist and skeptic has throughout his work used Yoruba philosophy as a literary ideology rather than as a religious doctrine. Consequently, in his latest work, the people of Aiyérò still hold Ogun in high esteem, but are united against the self-consecrated demi-gods who mask their human frailties through propaganda, terrorism and elimination of those who dare to think independently. After the holocaust of war in a nation "possessed by demons of blood" (*FP* 28) Soyinka, though still somewhat skeptical, is convinced that the only hope of salvation lies in forgiving "new realities," in ridding society of deceit, of perpetuated wrongs and "Of distorting shadows cast by old / And modern necromancers" (*A Shuttle in the Crypt*, p. 7). The eccentric dance of powerful bigots characterized as marionettes in Soyinka's new novel, must be terminated by whatever means necessary so that, at least, man's dim hope of ending continual strife and installing justice and harmony for all can be fulfilled.

NOTES

Introduction

[1] The poem "Prayer to the Masks" (*Poèmes* 23-4) illustrates the apocalyptic nature of Negritude poetry which extols the virtues and the culture of the black man. My translation.

[2] Achebe's *Arrow of God* depicts parallel systems of government; Ezeulu is the traditional Chief Priest who seeks to entrench himself in power and he clashes with his "friend" the District Officer, Winterbottom, who asks him to send his son to the mission school. The excerpt is from Chapter IV, p. 55.

[3] This excerpt from Soyinka's *Kongi's Harvest*, pp. 8 and 10, captures a traditional king's dirge on the loss of authority to a modern dictator.

[4] Senghor distinguishes between "universal civilisation," a colonizing civilization, and the "Civilization of the Universal," a phrase that Teilhard de Chardin used to signify an amalgam of different cultural components. Cp. Senghor's collection of essays, *Liberté I: Négritude et Humanisme*, pp. 317 and 399.

[5] "The Fourth Stage," *The Morality of Art*, ed., D. W. Jefferson, p. 125.

[6] In his *A History of Neo-African Literature*, pp. 265-6, Jahnheinz Jahn cites the following attempt by Soyinka to clear the issue: "The point is that, to quote what I said fully, I said: 'A tiger does not proclaim his tigritude, he pounces.' In other words: a tiger does not stand in the forest and say: 'I am a tiger.' When you pass where the tiger has walked before, you see the skeleton of the duiker, you know that some tigritude has been emanated there. In other words: the distinction which I was making at this conference (in Kampala, Uganda, 1962) was a purely literary one: I was trying to distinguish between propaganda and true poetic creativity. I was saying in other words that what one expected from poetry was an intrinsic poetic quality, not a mere name-dropping."

[7] "And After the Narcissist?" *African Forum*,(Spring 1966), pp. 53-64. Re visions of the future, see Soyinka's "The Writer in a Modern African State," in Wästberg, ed. *The Writer in Modern Africa*, p. 21.

[8] *Liberté I*, p. 260.

[9] L'Esthétique négro-africaine," *Diogène*, October, 1956. Quoted in *Senghor: Prose and Poetry*, eds. Reed and Wake, pp. 34-5.

[10] "Orphée noir," Sartre's preface to Senghor's *Anthologie* of 1948. See the English Translation in Bigsby, ed., *The Black American Writer*, Vol. 2, p. 6.

[11] *Nigeria Magazine*, No. 81 (June 1964), p. 157.

[12] See *Commonwealth Literature*, ed. John Press, p. 204.

[13] "Discours devant le Parlement du Ghana," February 1961. See Reed and Wake, *Prose and Poetry*, p. 97.

[14] *West Africa*, October 10, 1970, p. 1182.

[15] *Africa Report*, May 1972, p. 23.

[16] See "From A Common Backcloth," *American Scholar*, Vol. 32, No. 3 (Summer 1963), p. 389.

[17] Georges Balandier, *Ambiguous Africa*. (London: Chatto and Windus, 1966), p. 112.

[18] In the introduction to his *African Religions and Philosophy* Professor John Mbiti pointedly remarks that "Because traditional religions permeate all the departments of life, there is no formal distinction between the sacred and the secular, between the religious and nonreligious, between the spiritual and the material areas of life. Wherever the African is there is his religion," p. 2. See pp. 31-6 on the concept of time in African thought according to which the unborn and the dead are part of an unbroken process. Mbiti's purpose in this magnificent work is to establish the fundamental unity of thought in the religions of Africa's one thousand peoples (or tribes). Although Mbiti's work suffers, perhaps, from not presenting even in summary any one culture in its totality (the book promises to deal with African religions) unlike Jahnheinz Jahn's *Muntu* its exposition of African philosophy is an outcome of field research. Jahn admits that he is simply piecing together ideas from five writers who have studied individual African societies, but gives no basis for his selection. He has, moreover, unquestioningly followed the pronouncements of adherents of Negritude like Senghor by prescribing patterns of thought for all Africans as well as a style of art that has rhythm. My objections apply to the exposition of African philosophy and not to the other material presented in Jahn's work.

[19] "Les masques africains," *African Affairs* (Winter 1968), Vol. I, No. 2, 59: "Les masques africains interviennent activement dans la vie, dans les actions isolées comme dans les affaires publiques. Ils reflètent et révèlent l'existence humaine dans sa totalité, dans sa complexité comme participant à l'existence cosmique: animale, spirituelle, divine."

[20] The phrase is that of Father Placide Temples whose *Bantu Philosophy* in which it occurs (p. 65) was a source of ideas and insight to Senghor during his early career.

[21] B. Holas in L'imagerie rituelle en Afrique noire," *African Affairs*, Vol. I, No. 2, 49-50, notes that the serpent is one of the foremost ritual images in black Africa not unconnected with fertility and sexuality. (It is a remote parallel of the Freudian phallic symbol.) Camara Laye's *L'Enfant noir* (*The Dark Child*) has most imaginatively captured the relation between his goldsmith father and the elder Camara's totem-snake in the first chapter of the book.

[22] Césaire, unlike Senghor, is extremely derisive and accepts all the images projected on him by the white world in addition to projecting his own. He proclaims, "The master of laughter? / The master of impressive silence / The master of hope and despair? / The master of laziness? / . . . It is I." *Cahier*, *Présence Africaine* 1971 (1939, 1956), p. 150.

[23] Soyinka turns forty some time this year, 1974.

[24] From Soyinka's notes to his first published collection of poems, *Idanre and Other Poems* (Methuen, 1967), pp. 87-8

[25] These are mask-wearers representing the ancestral spirits of the village.

Chapter I: *Chants d'ombre*

[1] *Liberté I*, p. 139.

[2] See the Introduction to the translation by J. Reed and C. Wake of selections from Senghor's poetic and prose writings entitled *Léopold Sédar Senghor: Prose and Poetry*, p. 12. See also p. 26.

[3] See *African Literature Today*, No. 2, front cover and p. 52.

[4] Senghor has since published two new volumes of recently written poetry. They are *Elégie des alizés* (1969) and *Lettres d'hivernage* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1973). The first is an elegy to the trade winds that blow over tropical Africa. He explains the word 'hivernage" in the second volume as a product of the colonial experience. It represents the hibernation period of the rainy season in Senegal between June and October, corresponding to "summer and the beginning of autumn," as well as the period between "summer" and "autumn" for Woman. The poems are love lyrics in the tradition of *Chants pour Naëtt* of 1949 and the "D'autres chants" of *Ethiopiques*, 1956.

[5] Cp. *Liberté I*, pp. 9, 260.

[6] Coined from the French "ceux qui vont *a la* messe" (those who go to mass).

[7] "Signare" is probably of Portuguese origin (from *Senhora*) and usually applies to a woman of mixed blood. On account of Portuguese influence on the area around Cape Verde from the 15th century on, a half caste community soon grew in that territory. The Signares were women with status because they were usually mistresses to the Portuguese.

[8] Cp. C. S. Lewis, *The Four Loves* (Fontana Books) p. 96.

[9] The universal black woman is usually interchangeable with the concept of Africa as Mother. In Senghor's poetry, in particular, the black woman is often described as landscape and the landscape as black woman. Almost any anthology of black poetry will provide examples of this feature of black woman. For example, in Marie Collins's *Black Poets in French* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1972) Aimé Césaire salutes Africa as mother in his poem "Greetings to the Third World" (p. 51). The two poems by David Diop cited on this page are also included in this anthology. Paul Laurence Dunbar's "Ode to Ethiopia" anthologized in *Cavalcade: Negro American Writing from 1760 to the Present*, eds. Arthur Davis and Saunders Redding (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1971) is a tribute similar to Senghor's "A l'Appel de la race de Saba." "The Continent that Lies Within Us" by Abioseh Nicol appears in *The African Assertion: A Critical Anthology of African Literature*, ed. Austin Shelton (New York: Odyssey Press, 1968). Nicol apostrophizes Africa but concludes that the real Africa lies within the individual.

[10] *Liberté I*, p. 269.

[11] Ibid., pp. 117-8.

[12] Quoted from *The Black American Writer*, Vol. 2 (Penguin 1969), p. 6.

[13] Mezu, *op. cit.*, p. 72.

[14] Ibid., p. 117.

[15] Senghor, *Liberté I*, p. 167.

[16] Ibid., p. 214. For discussions of the importance of the masks and statues in African society, see *inter alia*, B. Holas, "L'Imagerie rituelle en Afrique noire" and L. Marfurt, "Les Masques africains" both in *African Arts/Arts d'Afrique*, Spring 68, pp. 48-53 and 54-61; H. Himmelheber, "Sculptors and Sculptures of the Dan" in *Proceedings of the First International Congress of Africanists* (Northwestern University Press, 1964), pp. 243-44 and C. Moore's "The Theme of the Ancestors in Senghor's Poetry," *Black Orpheus*, May 1959, pp. 15-17.

[17] See *Léopold Sédar Senghor: L'Homme et l'Oeuvre* (Présence Africaine, 1962), p. 37.

[18] Senghor, *Liberté I*, pp. 24-5.

[19] Ibid., p. 34.

[20] Ibid.

[21] Ibid., p. 114.

[22] Guibert, p. 45.

[23] In "Pierre Teilhard de Chardin et la politique africaine." Senghor describes the early phase of Negritude during the 1930's as "a weapon of defence and attack and inspiration rather than an instrument of construction." Quoted from Reed and Wake, *Prose and Poetry*, p. 99.

[24] Wilfred Cartey examines at length the theme of exile and return in Negritude poetry in the penetrating fifth chapter of his *Whispers from a Continent* (Random House, 1969).

Chapter II: *Hosties noires*

[1] In 1935 Desta Dantew was one of the provincial governors in Ethiopia when Italy invaded the country. Ras (i.e. Duke) Desta Dantew raised an outcry against the invasion and led an armed resistance movement when the Italians seized power. He was later captured and executed by the fascists. Senghor's poem, dated 1936, was written during the time of the resistance. See *Prose and Poetry*, pp. 170-1.

[2] Koumba the Orphan is a different personage from Koumba Tam, the Serer goddess of beauty invoked in "Negro Mask." Reed and Wake eliminate the "o" from Koumba apparently to avoid confusion with the English diphthong [ou]; there is, however, the tendency to pronounce the vowel "u" as the "u" in plum instead of as the "oo" in food which the French spelling "ou" approximates.

[3] I have translated this phrase--"l'avilissement de ses reins"--as "the dishonour of her loins," since Senghor frequently apostrophizes the continent of Africa as queen, goddess and mother rolled into one. It is unlikely that he would wish to suggest that the loins of Mother Africa are rotten. The notion of dishonour is more in tune with the themes of honour and dishonour or chicanery in this collection and with themes of other volumes as well.

[4] See Mezu, *Léopold Sédar Senghor*, pp. 98-9.

[5] *Liberté I*, p. 23.

[6] In characterizing his poetry as poetry of the Childhood Kingdom Senghor draws on imagery that links the child to its mother--the umbilical cord, the warm breast--and emphasizes its dependence. Senghor frequently expands the reference to his natural mother to symbolize Mother Africa. This tendency should be borne in mind in considering Soyinka's criticism of Senghor in "And After the Narcissist?" *African Forum*, (Spring 1966), pp. 53-64. Cp. below pp. 102-4.

[7] The original French text reads "O naif! nativement naif" and is translated by Reed and Wake as "Naive. Like a native." But Senghor is talking about innate trustfulness and does not intend the pejorative suggestions of the translation.

[8] A notable exception is Bernard Dadié, especially in poems such as "Ce que m'a donné la France" and "Frère blanc," the second of which preaches reconciliation and mutual coexistence through love and acceptance.

[9] Cited by Mezu, *op. cit.*, p. 88.

[10] Senghor's early choice of a vocation was that of a priest, but he was told that he did not have the calling.

[11] Senghor's native Senegal is not, however, distinguished for sculpture. By all accounts the poet himself had his first exposure to masks and statues as works of art in the museums of Paris and cannot therefore lay claim to such versatility.

[12] *Liberté I*, p. 34.

[13] Ibid., pp. 214-5.

[14] The double interpretation of the mask--as disguise and as revelation--exists in African thought generally but not in Senghor's own scheme of things. For him the African mask is always sacred and profound.

[15] See "Vues sur l'Afrique noire," *Liberté I*, pp. 40-45.

Chapter III: *Ethiopiques*

[1] Senghor first went to Paris in 1929. He settled in France from then until the 1950's, returning to Senegal only for visits or political campaigns.

[2] The Senegalese landscape generally, and Senghor's native Sine-Saloum in particular, usually extend to represent all of Africa in

Senghor's poetry. Sometimes he himself in his purported role as spokesman for Africa personifies the continent.

[3] Senghor pays tribute to Teilhard de Chardin's influence in his "Pierre Teilhard de Chardin et la politique africaine."

[4] See Senghor's "Postface" to *Ethiopiques*, *Poèmes*, p. 167.

[5] Guibert, *Léopold Sédar Senghor*, p. 68.

[6] Ibid., p. 69.

[7] See *Liberté I*, p. 260.

[8] Reed and Wake translate "Dans" as "In" instead of as "Dan," an incredible slip since the Dan dancers are very well known, certainly to Africanists.

[9] Consult "Black Orpheus," an English translation of Sartre's "Orphée noir" in *The Black American Writer*, Vol. 2, pp. 18-19 *inter alia*.

[10] For a discussion of the relative influences of both spheres of activity in Senghor's life see Mezu, *op. cit.*, Chapters 5 and 6.

[11] Senghor concludes *Ethiopiques* with remarks about the reception of his *Anthologie*. He also makes many pointed remarks about his views on poetry and about the genesis of his own poems for which he often suggested the musical instrument(s) to be used as accompaniment. See *Poèmes*, 155ff.

[12] In *Transition* IV, 15 (1964), 51.

[13] *African Forum* (Spring 1966), pp. 53-64. Quotations of 12 words or more will be noted.

[14] Ibid., p. 60.

[15] Ibid., pp. 59-60.

[16] Ibid., p. 64.

Chapter IV: *Nocturnes*

[1] "Signare" was used to refer to a half-caste woman who had a liaison with a Portuguese man. Senghor cannot use a work which suggests a white woman without undertaking major revisions of the beloved's mask features and dark beauty. To avoid these revisions, he omits the poem

where the name "Naëtt" is chanted, removes the phrase "Naëtt of Satang" from a poem which celebrates her qualities of blackness ("My sister, these hands of night") and in this last remaining instance where he speaks of "a fair Negress" (Une négresse blonde") he changes "Naëtt" to "Signare." It seems that in the poet's blend of opposites his French wife has become a half-caste while he is something of a Toubab or white man. Cp. "For Koras and Balafong" PP 110.

[2] This poem is quoted from Moore and Beier, *Modern Poetry from Africa* (Penguin), pp. 54-55.

[3] See the introduction to their translation of *Nocturnes*, p. x.

[4] Ibid.

[5] This is a combination of the word *lamana*, a landowner, from Serer, Senghor's mother tongue, and the Greek word *archos*, meaning ruler. Senghor introduces a number of neologisms in his later poetry, and in his revisions of earlier poems he sometimes substitutes words from his first language in place of the original French words.

[6] Senghor put together his most important essays in a volume significantly titled *Liberté I: Negritude et Humanisme*. His brand of humanism is modelled on the teaching of the French Jesuit priest, scientist and philosopher, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin. Teilhard de Chardin's theory of the evolution of the physical and more particularly the *biological* universe towards unity and fusion with God, is readily reconcilable with the African world view of uninterrupted progression from the grain of sand or the pebble up to God, which Senghor read in another Catholic priest's study: *Bantu Philosophy*, by Father Placide Tempels.

[7] *Présence Africaine*, 78, p. 6.

[8] See Senghor's *Anthologie*, pp. xxxix-xliv for a summary of this discussion of Negritude. A readily accessible English translation is to be found in Bigsby, ed., *The Black American Writer*, Vol. 2, pp. 34-9.

[9] Cp. "Problématique de la Négritude," *Présence Africaine* 78, p. 25.

[10] Cp. Hymans, chapter 17.

Chapter V: *Things Fall Apart*

[1] On the "Scramble", see *inter alia* Raymond Betts, ed., *The Scramble for Africa: Causes and Dimensions of Empire*. Boston: Heath, 1966.

[2] Lord Lugard, *The Dual Mandate in British Tropical Africa* (London: Frank Cass, 1965) was first published in 1922. It is a wide-ranging work covering all facets of British administration policy and relations with the colonies.

[3] The case of the warrant chiefs appointed as intermediaries between the British administration is examined by A. E. Afigbo in *The Warrant Chiefs: Indirect Rule in Southeastern Nigeria, 1891-1929* (London: Longman, 1972). Afigbo considers not only the theory of Lugardism but discusses critically the situations in Nigeria which have not been as well known as Lugard's ideas. He concludes: "The history of the Warrant Chief System is a tale of wrong assumptions leading to wrong decisions and wrong remedies and finally of failure." (p. 296).

[4] See *Commonwealth Literature* ed. John Press (London: Heinemann, 1965), p. 204.

[5] Ibid., p. 205.

[6] A. G. Stock, "Yeats and Achebe," *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, 5 (July 1968), pp. 105-111.

[7] Quoted from Joseph Conrad, *Complete Works*, Complete Edition, Vol. XVI (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, Page and Co., 1924), 50-1.

[8] See also Weinstock, "Achebe's Christ Figure," *Journal of the New African Literature and the Arts*, 5th and 6th (1968). I do not, however, agree with some of Weinstock's parallels, e.g. that Okonkwo is a Judas.

[9] Cp. Jeffrey Meyers, "Culture and History in *Things Fall Apart*, *Critique*, XI 1 (1968), 26.

[10] My interpretation of the novel differs radically from that of Harry Scheub in "When a Man Fails Alone," *Presence Africaine*, 74 (1970), 61 ff. Scheub painstakingly documents Okonkwo's breaches of custom as examples of his attempt to undermine the society. But Okonkwo never deliberately breaks the rules. Achebe clearly demonstrates that such actions stem from Okonkwo's character. Scheub understands the dynamics of life in Umuofia but does not seem to appreciate the extent to which the religious, social and political structure has been undermined when he says that the clan survives the impact of colonization.

The fact remains that the way of life that Achebe depicts is completely altered by the impact of cultural conflict. Achebe's subtle presentation in this novel is explicitly stated in his essay. See above pp. 8-9 and 136-8.

[11] In "Chinua Achebe: The Artist's Changing Roles," an unpublished paper read at the *Symposium on Culture and the Black Struggle*, Queens College, Flushing, New York, March 10, 1973, p. 6.

[12] Cp. Weinstock and Ramadan, *op. cit.*, p. 35ff.

Chapter VI: *Arrow of God*

[1] Cp. the legend about the title of king (originally supposed to be a fifth title above the existing four graded titles) which was unattainable because no one could pay all the debts of his clansmen as it required.

[2] In Umuaro an age grade, "Age Grade of the Breaking of the Guns," was named after this incident. Age grades do not correspond to calendar years, for they simply refer to young men who undergo circumcision at the same time. Consequently, the Umuaro villagers do have some sense of reckoning beyond seasons, Winterbottom's assertion to the contrary.

[3] See Achebe's "English and the African Writer," *Transition*, IV, 18 (1965), 29-30, where he illustrates the way the language of this passage suits Ezeulu's character in the novel.

[4] There are several references to the theme of challenge in *Arrow of God*, among them the challenge of the little bird to his personal god (II, 17, cp. II. 31-2) and that of Eneke Ntulukpa (XV, 244). It is noteworthy that in the story of the challenge of Eneke-nti-oba which Ezeulu endorses, the bird is finally thrown by the cat. Cp. *Things Fall Apart*, VII, 48).

[5] A good deal of emphasis has been placed on the difference between French and British colonial policies in Africa. The French had an assimilationist policy, that of inducting the colonized peoples into French civilization and culture. The French also considered "association" with their territories, which is roughly the same as "indirect rule." In practice, as Leonard Thompson suggests in his essay "France and Britain in Africa: A Perspective" (in Gifford, 1971, p. 777) the differences between the two systems "were in fact much less significant than they seemed to white observers at the time." Thompson also points out that historians of the colonial period have for the most part been white scholars. These historians have been content to reveal "more about what the French and the British thought they were doing in Africa

than what they were actually doing there" (p. 780). Albert Memmi's portrait of the colonizer in Part I of his *The Colonizer and the Colonized* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969) fits the character of Winterbottom although Memmi's experience was with French colonialism.

[6] For studies of the African mask, see, *inter alia*, H. Himmelheber, "Sculptors and Sculptures of the Dan" in *Proceedings of the First International Congress of Africanists*, (Northwestern University Press, 1964), pp. 243-55, L. Marfurt, "Les masques africains" in *African Arts*, (Spring 1968), pp. 54-61 and Justine Cordwell, African Art," in *Continuity and Change in African Cultures*, ed. W. Bascom (University of Chicago Press, 1959), pp. 28-48.

[7] For an opposed viewpoint see Introduction to *Arrow of God* (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor Books, 1969) by K. W. Post, p. x.

[8] Cp. "The Role of the Writer in a New Nation," *Nigeria Magazine*, 81 (June 1964), p. 160.

Chapter VII: *No Longer at Ease*

[1] Cp. Achebe's "The Role of the Writer in a New Nation," *Nigeria Magazine*, 81 (June 1964), p. 157.

[2] The child of two worlds *motif* has been dominant in African fiction, arising from the introduction of Western education. It has links with the Negritude image of the returned exile, that is, the young aspirant who goes to study in Britain or France from one of the colonies and returns home.

[3] Negritude, as expounded by Sartre in "Black Orpheus," has as one of its fundamental aims the reversal of a European value system based on a solar hierarchy and its replacement by a racial hierarchy. This inverse method Sartre calls "anti-racist racism" whereby black becomes synonymous with goodness and virtue, and white with the opposite.

[4] This is a complete reversal of his original position. See the discussion between Obi and Christopher on the subject of bribery in Ch. XII, pp. 120-2.

[5] Cp. the paltering, anti-intellectual sentiments in the government of the unnamed state in *A Man of the People*, Ch. I, p. 5.

[6] Connections such as these give Achebe's four novels their continuity and the appearance of a tetralogy even though they were not conceived as such. It is true that Obi's father does not appear in a

Arrow of God, the novel set in the generation after Okonkwo's tragedy; yet this reference to the incident of the Breaking of the Guns marks his major years as contemporary with the early 1920's when Winterbottom ordered all local guns broken (*AG* II, 34). Achebe substitutes Umuaro for Aninta but the connection still remains.

[7] Achebe discusses his mission school experiences in a number of articles. See especially "The Role of the Writer," *loc. cit.* and "The Novelist as Teacher" in *Commonwealth Literature*, ed. John Press (London: Heinemann, 1965), pp. 203-4.

[8] See "Conversation with Chinua Achebe" by Lewis Nkosi and Wole Soyinka, *Africa Report*, July, 1964, p. 20.

Chapter VIII: *A Man of the People*

[1] In his *Mother is Gold* (Cambridge University Press, 1971), Adrian Roscoe acknowledges Achebe's departures into satire and the first person narrative but roundly criticizes the novelist's failure with the new medium and the new technique. Roscoe seems to base his denouncement on the following statement by Achebe about his writing: "Perhaps what I write is applied art as distinct from pure. But who cares?" ("The Novelist as Teacher," John Press, p. 205). Roscoe's dismissal of the work after a cursory review smacks of applied criticism rather than pure.

[2] This view of himself as "hero" is undermined by Odili's conduct during the struggle. Although his view about the people's apathy at the end echoes Achebe's, Odili's motives and his naiveté during the campaign are scarcely commendable.

[3] In a recent interview (*Africa Report*, May 1972, p. 27 Achebe equated the conduct of the army with that of the politicians when he said:

> *A Man of the People* with today's setting would feature the army instead of politicians. But the masses would still be as cynical, which is not to say that they should therefore be abandoned to their lot. The whole point of being a leader is that, in spite of the cynicism or the despair of the masses, it is your job to do something for them. They don't have to deserve it because they are law-abiding, sensible and obedient. After all, whether they are or not, they are still brothers, sisters, fathers and mothers.
>
> If you create a situation in which they see certain values distorted they tend to copy it and lose their own direction. But that does not absolve the leaders. The moment you declare yourself

the leader of your people, you've taken on their vessel. You are "carrying" their god, and you have become their priest.

[4] "The Role of the Writer in a New Nation," *Nigeria Magazine*, 81 (1964), p. 157.

[5] Ibid., p. 159.

[6] Cp. "English and the African Writer," *Transition* IV, 18 (1965), 29-30.

[7] *Transition* IV, 18 (1965), 17. Reprinted in Okigbo's *Labyrinths with Paths of Thunder* New York: (Africana Publishing Corp., 1971), p. 47.

[8] Achebe's views on the war are set forth in an article "The African Writer and the Biafran Cause," *Conch* I, 1 (March 1969), 8-14 and in an interview, "Chinua Achebe on Biafra," *Transition* 36 (1968), pp. 31-7.

Chapter IX: *A Dance of the Forests*

[1] Soyinka, *The Interpreters* (London: Heinemann, 1970), p. 9.

[2] *A Dance of the Forests*, *The Lion and the Jewel*, *The Swamp Dwellers*, *The Trials of Brother Jero* and *The Strong Breed* contained in one volume entitled *Five Plays* (Oxford University Press, 1964), *The Road* (Oxford University Press, 1965), *Kongi's Harvest* (Oxford University Press, 1967) and *Madmen and Specialists* (London: Methuen, 1971).

[3] *Idanre and Other Poems* (London: Methuen, 1967) and *A Shuttle in the Crypt* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1972).

[4] The novels are *The Interpreters* (London: Heinemann, 1970) and *Season of Anomy* (New York: Third Press, 1974). An account of Soyinka's experiences in prison has been published under the title *The Man Died* (New York: Harper and Row, 1973).

[5] An example of Soyinka's unorthodox use of tradition is the combination of two deities, Esu and Oro, to form Eshuoro in *A Dance of the Forests*. See Oyin Ogunba, "The Traditional Content of the Plays of Wole Soyinka," *African Literature Today*, 4, pp. 2-18 and 5, pp. 106-115 for discussions of Soyinka's use of tradition.

[6] Cp. the debate between Akunna and Mr. Brown in *Things Fall Apart*, Ch. XXI.

[7] But see Soyinka's translator's note to *The Forest of a Thousand Daemons* (London: Nelson, 1968).

[8] *Idanre and Other Poems*, pp. 57-8.

[9] Ibid., p. 28.

[10] See Ogunba, p. 8f.

[11] In a pointed image, Soyinka refers to death as a "scrap-iron dealer" fulfilling the whim of Ogun, god of the Road. See "In Memory of Segun Awolowo," *Idanre and Other Poems*, p. 14. Continued existence in the world of spirits is maintained only as long as offerings are made uninterruptedly by living descendants of the deceased person. When these offerings **cease** the ancestor becomes "perfectly dead," that is, fades into nothingness.

[12] See *The Morality of Art*, ed., D. W. Jefferson (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1970), p. 125.

[13] Ibid., p. 125.

[14] Ibid., p. 124.

[15] See O. Taiwo, *Introduction to West African Literature* (London: Nelson, 1967), p. 78.

[16] See Okigbo's introduction to *Labyrinths* written in 1965. Cp. Soyinka's introductions, especially that of *A Shuttle in the Crypt*.

[17] Ogunba, p. 8.

[18] See E. D. Jones, *The Writing of Wole Soyinka*, p. xiii.

[19] Aroni says in his Prologue (*FP* 2) that "Eshuoro is the wayward flesh of ORO--Oro whose agency serves much of the bestial human, whom they invoke for terror."

[20] In "The Writer in a Modern African State," *The Writer in Modern Africa*, ed. Per Wastberg (New York: Africana Publishing Corp., 1969), p. 20.

[21] Re Senghor, cp. above p. 90. With reference to Achebe I have treated the subject of the many roles of the artist in an unpublished paper, "Chinua Achebe: The Artist's Changing Roles," *Symposium on Culture and the Black Struggle*, Queens College, Flushing, New York, March 8-10, 1973.

[22] Soyinka discusses the situation of the modern African writer in "The Writer in a Modern African State."

[23] Margaret Laurence, *Long Drums and Cannons* (New York: Praeger, 1968), p. 37, considers inadequate this parallel with "Demoke's agonised slaying of his mocking apprentice Oremole." Such an assertion amounts to a dismissal of the plays' farcical quality. Besides, Laurence misrepresents the novice's breaking of his arm as his death.

[24] Margaret Laurence, pp. 43-6, critically assesses judgments by Una Maclean and Ulli Beier and then offers her own. Laurence, Moore in his *Wole Soyinka* (New York: Africana Publishing Corp., 1971), pp. 40-3 and Jones, *The Writing of Wole Soyinka*, pp. 46-8 offer valuable insights about the play's ending which reveal the ambivalence of its meaning.

[25] "The Writer in a Modern African State," p. 20.

Chapter X: *The Road, Kongi's Harvest, Madmen and Specialists*

[1] Soyinka, "The Fourth Stage," in Jefferson, p. 126.

[2] This internal logic is perhaps the best indication of Soyinka's independence of the Absurdist tradition in drama. Soyinka's position is not that life is absurd but that those who are in power contrive to make it a futile and lack-lustre experience for the majority of people.

[3] See his *The Writing of Wole Soyinka*, p. 61. See also p. 71. Jones's analysis of the characters and situations in the play is, on the whole, a penetrating one.

[4] *Long Drums and Cannons*, p. 63.

[5] In *Wole Soyinka*, p. 64.

[6] Ogunba, p. 8.

[7] Muzi-Pasi E. Shumba in his M. A. thesis, *Structure and Ideas in Soyinka's* Madmen and Specialists (University of Alberta, Fall, 1973) p. 17 points out the close resemblance between some passages in *Kongi's Harvest* and passages in former Ghanaian President Kwame Nkrumah's philosophical treatise, *Consciencism* (New York: Monthly Press, 1964).

[8] Ogunba, p. 8.

[9] Shumba suggests also that in these passages there is a direct satire of Nkrumah's book.

[10] While in prison, Soyinka composed many poems in his head and recited them until an opportunity presented itself to write down the lines. The ingenious method which he documents in *The Man Died* was to use a specially concocted "Soy-ink" and write with his fingernail on salvaged material. Two poems written in this way, "Live Burial" and "Flowers for my Land," were spirited out of prison and appeared under the title *Poems from Prison* (London: Rex Collings, 1969). They are included in *A Shuttle in the Crypt*.

[11] The dates of the last three titles are for the American editions. In general, English editions appeared slightly earlier. The subsequent discussion of the play *Madmen and Specialists* was completed before Mr. Shumba's work (above note 7) became available to me. Mr. Shumba's analysis covers many points not raised here and attempts to answer some of the imponderabilia mentioned below, e.g., p. 333.

[12] If this theory of counter-violence is also Soyinka's position, it constitutes a tacit admission that insensitive African leaders are not responsive to the criticism of artists like Soyinka. If he adopted this position before his imprisonment, Soyinka's later experiences must have strengthened his conviction.

[13] Sartre writes: "Negritude is for destroying itself, it is a "crossing to" and not an "arrival at," a means and not an end," because "it aims at preparing the synthesis or realization of the human being in a raceless society. (Bigsby, vol. II, p. 36). Cp. the reaction of Fanon to this passage in his *Black Skin, White Masks* pp. 132-3. Senghor is ambivalent towards Sartre's characterization of Negritude as "anti-racist racism." Cp. *Liberte I*, pp. 98 and 316.

[14] In an interview by *Africa Report* correspondents Ernest and Pat Emenyonu (May 1972) p. 23, Achebe remarked: "As for Négritude, that has been flogged too much. It was a good war cry once upon a time. It no longer is--and one good pointer to the fact that it is no longer is Senegal, which to my mind is one of the seats of neocolonialism. If this is a result of Négritude, and one of its archpriests is, in fact, running the affairs of Senegal, then obviously that thing no longer works." Achebe's statement compares with sentiments expressed by Soyinka in "The Writer in a Modern African State" (in Per Wästberg) and in "And After the Narcissist?" q.v.

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